

University of South Carolina Scholar Commons

Theses and Dissertations

2017

Narrating the (Im)Migrant Experience: 21st Century African Fiction in the Age of Globalization

Bernard Ayo Oniwe
University of South Carolina

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Oniwe, B. A. (2017). *Narrating the (Im)Migrant Experience: 21st Century African Fiction in the Age of Globalization*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/4524>

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.

Narrating the (Im)Migrant Experience:
21st Century African Fiction in the Age of Globalization

By

Bernard Ayo Oniwe

Bachelor of Arts
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 1991

Master of Arts
University of South Carolina, 2009

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

Comparative Literature

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2017

Accepted by:

Jeanne Garane, Major Professor

Anne Gulick, Committee Member

Alexander Beecroft, Committee Member

Meili Steele, Committee Member

Qiana Whitted, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

© Copyright by Bernard Ayo Oniwe, 2017
All Rights Reserved.

DEDICATION

To my late father, Lawrence Ajibade Oniwe, whose library was my first vista into World Literature. To my mother, Veronica Aduke Oniwe, you kept reminding me to get my dissertation done in a timely fashion. To my family, Adetutu, Adekunle, Adeyemi, Ikeade and Abimbola, thanks for not giving up on me. My gratitude to James Oniwe, my supportive uncle.

To Chiagoziem “DL” Obiajunwa for spearheading my return to writing-mode in the last couple of months and making sure this project is completed and defended before deadline. My thanks also go to Chioma Odidika and amazing Bernard Dayo Iloanya for being an integral part of my life in Columbia. Also, to all parishioners of St. Thomas More, St. Martin de Porres, St. John Neumann, Our Lady of the Lake, and Our Lady of the Hills-where I was offered a home and friendship. And to my Dominican friars in United States and Nigeria, your words of encouragement and prayers helped a lot. And to others not mentioned by name, this is for you as well.

To the living God who cannot fail, glory Alleluia!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project wouldn't have seen the light of day and completed at this time without the support and direction of Dr. Jeanne Garane. She reassured me when I entertained doubt that she had confidence in me.

I would like to thank other members of my committee: Dr. Anne Gulick, Dr. Meili Steele, Dr. Alexander Beecroft and Dr. Qiana Whitted for their insightful comments and encouraging smiles during my defense. I would also like to extend thanks to Dr. Kwame Dawes for his support of my research. Thanks as well to Mariam Olorundare who offered support with research on history of African novel. Thank you also to Henning Liese and Paul Hudacko for helping with formatting of the document.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the fiction of 21st century African writers as a product of engagement with the forces of globalization and the related notions of cosmopolitanism and the fact of South to North migration. Analyzing migrant experiences in the writings of Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail* (2007), Chika Unigwe's *The Black Street Sisters* (2009), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2011) and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2013), I argue that third-generation African writers, while building on the works of previous generations, take a global turn, and in the process, push the borders of African literature beyond the continent. 21st century African fiction, I argue, converses with, complicates, and contextualizes complimentary claims that globalization enhances cosmopolitan ideals, promotes racial diversity and preserves human dignity. These mainly migrant literatures written by Africans who transit between the continent and the West reveal an emerging new face of contemporary 21st century African literature, indicating a transition from a previous preoccupation with parochial and national issues to narrating often dystopian experiences of African migrants to the West, a situation made possible primarily by the forces and processes of globalization. My dissertation focuses on the fiction of Third African Generation writers in order to show the ways in which their works enrich postcolonial theoretical discourse by navigating the complexity that describes African fiction's imbrication in World Literature through the experiences of migrants. Through the prism of African migrant experiences, global issues like

cosmopolitanism, racism and human trafficking are viewed and analyzed with the aim of illustrating the promises and failures of globalization. I offer an overview of globalization theory, marking out what Simon Gikandi calls “the dystopic version” of globalization as the form that contemporary African diasporic fiction engages with and questions. I conclude that the form of globalization that impacts many African countries still adheres to colonialist North-South hierarchies, ensuring the preservation of neo-colonial center-periphery existences.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	v
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: African Women, Global Women: Selling Sex and the Deceit of Transnational Migration in Abani's <i>Becoming Abigail</i> and Unigwe's <i>On Black Sisters Street</i>	20
Chapter 2: Globalization and Race Discourse in Adichie's <i>Americanah</i>	69
Chapter 3 Cosmopolitan Conversation and Challenge in Teju Cole's <i>Open City</i>	106
Conclusion	143
Works Cited	158
Appendix A: Permission to Reprint	166

INTRODUCTION

Fifty-five years after the 1962 African Writers Conference on African literature written in English held at Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda, African writers and scholars of African literature in the 21st century are still responding to questions raised and debated at the landmark meeting. At that historic gathering of major African writers and critics, the question of what language African literature should be written in was hotly discussed at length within the purview and framework of another significant question, what constitutes African literature? The 1960's was a period of nationalist agitation and independence from colonialists on the African continent. As a result, pertinence of discussing the language in which works would or should be written was an issue which the participants considered as primary in the promotion of an understanding of the African world and African identity. For some, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (at the time James Ngugi) in particular, African literature had to be written in African languages¹.

¹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o expresses his mind on the correlation between language and freedom or subjugation years later in the following words: "The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (*Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London, Heinemann, 1986), 9.

Today, in the 21st century, the question still has relevance for African writers and scholars². In the 21st century, considered to be the “global age,” what should be considered African literature? What should scholars of African literature consider in creating the canon of African literature? In this regard, Ernest Emenyonu’s questions on the direction and future of African literature in his editorial in *African Literature Today* (2006) become relevant and very important for the purpose of this dissertation: “What should be the concerns of African literature in the 21st century?” and “What challenges does African literature pose for writers, critics, teachers, publishers and the book industry in the 21st century?” (xii), he asks. Responding to these questions drives this study.

Globalization and related notions of migration and cosmopolitanism are major influences on 21st century African literatures. In the era of globalization, African fiction has transcended continental boundaries; it has taken a global turn in all its complexities. Contemporary African fiction is globally contextualized, and its aesthetic and authorial trajectories are marked by the mobility of people in space and time. My dissertation will examine some recent critically celebrated novels of 21st century African writers for their transnational and migratory identities, their global and cosmopolitan thematic concerns, and how their global turn is redefining the canon of African literature. Place the info from footnote here. This is important! For the purposes of this study, by 21st century

² To mark the historic conference and discuss its legacy, the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) held a conference on 28 October 2017 with the first African Nobel laureate in Literature Wole Soyinka, giving the keynote speech. He had also been a prominent participant at the Makerere African Writers Conference

African fictions, I refer to African migrant works written in English and published in the West beginning from year the 2000. Also, I focus on Anglophone Nigerian writers whose works constitute a sizeable portion of this contemporary literary corpus, and are therefore arguably representational of what is termed here “African literature.” This, in my view, is so because the concerns and experiences that inform the works of the Nigerian writers examined here are commonly shared with writers from other African regions and written about in other languages. While I am aware of the problematic of this approach, I believe that it is valid for the purposes of this dissertation.

The cosmopolitan or global turn of third generation Anglophone and Francophone sub-Saharan writers, a deviation from the anti-colonization and nationalistic engagement of the first and second generation African writers, deserves and has received some modicum of critical attention.³ Some of these critical interventions appraise and examine the experience of the African immigrant in terms of notions of identity continually constructed by the dialectic pull of homeland and host country. Therefore, this work will build on this critical approach by stressing the globality of their identity and narratives in

³ Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton identify the mid-1980 as the emergence of those who “came to be identified as writers of the third generation in Anglophone and Francophone critical traditions” (“Introduction: Nigeria's Third Generation Writing: Historiography and Preliminary Theoretical Considerations.” *English in Africa* 32.1 (May 2005): 14 and Mabanckou and Thomas speak to the third generation Francophone sub-Saharan African literature context in particular in terms of its transformation “through its engagement with the concept of *globalizations* while simultaneously becoming *globalized*” (“Editors’ Preface: Francophone Sub-Saharan African Literature in Global Contexts.” *Yale French Studies* 120 (2011): 2.

an age of globalization. My dissertation therefore seeks to further the discussion of the question of what constitutes African writing in the 21st century.

The ongoing phenomenon of African born writers residing in America and Europe who write about African migrant experiences demands a critical analysis. The writers whose works were produced in the last decade and half write not only of the experience of Africans living abroad but often also the connection with home. But this corpus of writing also portrays the impact of recent and ongoing globalization on notions of home and identity. As Tanure Ojaide states: “Migration, globalization, and the related phenomenon of exile, transnationality, and multilocality have their bearing on the cultural identity, aesthetics, content, and form(s?) of the literary productions of Africans abroad.” (“Migration, Globalization and Recent African Literature” 43). With this in view, this study will be analyzing these new migrant writings to draw out the role of globalization on African novels of immigration.

Several critics have written on these contemporary African writers, both Anglophone and Francophone. Tanure Ojaide’s “Migration, Globalization and Recent African Literature” focuses on Anglophone sub-Saharan writers, emphasizing their disconnection from the continent when compared to their predecessors; their criticism of failures of postcolonial leaders; their preferences for themes of coming of age; their experimentation with forms; and their propensity to “write seemingly with a Western or American audience in mind” (45). Likewise, in Lydie Moudileno’s *Littératures africaines francophones des années 1980 et 1990*, Francophone writers of both second and third generation are read as not wanting to be narrowed down to Africans but rather want to be seen as Black French. Though some of the novels have settings in Africa, they

tend to focus more on individual experiences than community. Ayo A. Coly's *The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood: Gender and Migration in Francophone African Literatures* offers a different reading of the novels of contemporary Francophone African sub-Saharan writers. She argues against the post-national identity ascribed to them by some other critics.⁴ My own reading of these new migrant writers will build on and extend on Ayo Coly's argument about ongoing connection to home and national identity despite the strong and detaching arms of globalization.

As will be shown in the chapters that follow, my dissertation examines the impact of ongoing globalization on recent mobility and the relocation of African populations to the global North, especially to highly industrialized countries the like United States, France, Great Britain and Belgium. My work will seek to unveil how global modernity is necessarily implicated in situations leading to a recent upsurge in the desire and attempts by disenchanted populaces of sub-Saharan Africa to migrate to the industrial countries of the North based on the promises and dreams of material success. In the process, I will show how imbricated are the notions of globalization and immigration. Through a careful distinction of forms of globalization, I argue that the concept embodies a form of neo-⁵colonial or imperialist imperative. A critical analysis of novels of third generation

⁴ Ayo Coly disagrees with a reading of contemporary Francophone African writers as doing away with attachment to national home and identity in the age of globalization. "The lack of a direct confrontation with colonialism allegedly has emancipated this postcolonial migrant offspring from roots and national attachments in favor of multiple passports, euphoric vagrancy, and self-indulging cosmopolitanism." (xii). Coly addresses this form of reading by analyzing female migrant writers from gender perspective to show that national-home discourse is still important to postcolonial subject identity.

⁵ See *Afrique sur Seine: A New Generation of African Writers in Paris* (2005).

Anglophone sub-Saharan writers will not only expose the connection between globalization (or French *mondialization*) and migration but will also draw out the interconnection of concepts of home, exile and identities which in recent analytical frameworks for postcolonial literatures have taken on complex and troubled values. Critics like Odile Cazenave for instance, argue that concepts like home and identity in a particularly African mode no longer attract positive views in the works of migrant African writers. Unlike the writers of first or second generation, third generation African writers have distanced themselves from a claim to a primary belonging to Africa. I intend to approach my analysis from multiple disciplinary perspectives which implies that I will draw African studies, global and transnational studies, postcolonial studies and women's and gender studies theoretical frameworks. These approaches, especially global studies theoretical framework suggest the global dimension to the African experience and African literatures.

Globalization and the Genealogy of African Fiction

Quotidian African life in the 21st century is progressively enfolded in issues of global health, global economy, global ecology, global communication, global migration and global terrorism. Like the rest of the world, Africans are impacted by current globalization processes. Considering the impact of globalization on multiple aspects of African life, this dissertation explores and analyzes a selection of 21st century African novels for the way their forms and subjects have been influenced and have engaged with the process of globalization. The mass of scholarly production on globalization and the

vastness of research on the concept and practice of globalization has made theorization on globalization a somewhat overwhelming task.

Nevertheless, theorizing globalization has transcended its initial academic scope in the social sciences to embrace inquiry from other disciplines. Though originally a social theory pertaining to the social sciences, in the current dispensation, globalization is discussed in relation to other disciplines beyond the social sciences. Jan Aart Scholte reflects the mind of many other scholars in advocating “the necessity of transcending narrow disciplinary divisions in order more fully to understand globalization”

(*Globalization: A Critical Introduction* xiv). The humanities have embraced and engaged with theories of globalization to indicate the trans-disciplinary reach of globalization. By extension, literary and cultural productions have jumped on the bandwagon of the recent wave of globalization theorizing from the creative approach to publishing. Creative writers are now more consciously writing with global audiences and issues in mind and publishing is more likely to embrace and promote non-western writers with such global approach.

The postcolonial critic Simon Gikandi for instance argues that globalization and postcoloniality as frameworks of textual analysis share an organic relationship. He suggests that the harmonization of globalization and postcolonial theoretical perspectives has become invaluable to a literary appraisal of contemporary African literatures. While scholars in the fields of globalization and postcolonial theory might have diverse opinions on the defining nature of their discipline, Gikandi argues that they share two things in common: they attempt an explanation of how social and cultural interactions have transcended the nation-state boundary and offer viewpoints explaining cultural

mobility and exchanges that indicate the obsolescence of “a homogenous Eurocentric narrative of development and social change” (628).

In African literature for instance, writers, as well as the form and content of their cultural productions, reflect the impacts of a new wave of globalization. A great proportion of contemporary African writers embrace multiple identities and occupy transnational locations; hence the focus of their literary works is no longer circumscribed mainly by national or African issues and audience but tries as well to cater to the interest of global readers.

My dissertation interrogates the theoretical concept of globalization from many points of view because the social process and phenomenon called globalization is by its nature very fluid and enigmatic, hence difficult to capture in one definition. Generally, it is seen in terms of liberal capitalism that supports the free flow of people, idea, labor and information to enhance an international based economic and political practice. As a modern global phenomenon, Manfred B. Steger gives a compressed definition of globalization as “the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-space” (*Globalization* 15). For Steger, the multidimensional aspects of globalization are economic, political, cultural, technological and ecological and are generally characterized by “the creation of new, and multiplications of existing, social networks and activities that cut across traditional political, economic, cultural, and geographical boundaries”; “the expansion and the stretching of social relations, activities, and interdependencies;” “the intensification and acceleration of social exchanges and activities;” and “the creation of new individual and collective identities nurtured by the intensifying relations between the individual and the globe” (14-15).

Globalization means different things to different stakeholders involved. In my dissertation, I will be interrogating globalization in terms of transnational, post-national and hybrid discourses that inform contemporary literatures. There is no doubt that there are those who have read globalization as a new form of imperialism that sets in motion a new form of hegemonic control of the global world by the capitalist West, hence its privilege of the West over the East due to the uneven distribution of the modern capitalist spread of wealth. It makes claims to the decline of nation-states facilitating movements of people, wealth and ideas, but, transnational companies and global organizations have become tools of the new imperialism disguised in the concept of globalization. There are also scholars who see globalization as going beyond the binary of the West dominating the East in a kind of global “McDonaldization.” Instead they see it as facilitating a process of braiding East-West hybridity. In his “Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination” for instance, Appadurai praises a form of globalization: “globalization from below...which strives for a democratic and autonomous standing in respect to the various forms by which global power further seeks to extend its dominion” (*Globalization* 3) and obligates academia through research to find ways so that the interests of the less wealthy majority of the global world may not be sacrificed to any selfish tendency on the part of the international bodies.⁶

⁶ A considerable amount of scholarship exists on the suspect nature of globalization, implicating it in the project of neo-imperialism. See Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001); and Jean-Francois Bayart, *Le gouvernement du monde* (Paris: Fayart, 2004). There are equally a large number of scholars who view globalization positively. See John Tomlinson, *Globalization and*

My contention in this dissertation is that what Appadurai advocates does not take into consideration that the relics of the universalism of European modernity still constitute a means by which international or global bodies are operated. It also does not take into consideration the problematics of populations of the South crossing boundaries as immigrants into the host countries of the global North where the systemic and historical problems that undermine their homeland originate, in most cases. I argue that despite its hypothetical promises of the decline of influences of the nation-state and as a result of the free interconnection of the local and global for a hybrid global population, globalization, with particular reference to sub-Saharan African nation-states, is largely a myth, as I demonstrate in my analysis of the works by Chika Unigwe, Chris Abani, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Teju Cole, all contemporary African writers.

An aspect of globalization that is not in contention is its role in facilitating with greater ease the movement of people across nation-state boundaries. Because of the economic system put in place by West-controlled global capitalism, there is the need for the global South to supply labor to the global North. Hence, with more advanced forms of communication and transportation, the population of the global South migrating to the North has relatively increased when compared to what obtained in the past. As Saskia Sassen observes, “The specific forms of the internationalization of capital over the past twenty years have contributed to mobilizing people into migration streams”

Culture (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1996); and Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Melange*, Rowman, 2009.

(*Globalization and its Discontents* xxxvi). Immigration has been on the rise since the 1980s and African immigrants have flocked to centers of their previous colonial masters and new imperial powers because of globalization. Much scholarship exists on the representation of African immigrants not only in academic disciplines like sociology, history, geography and anthropology but also in the cultural works like novels and films. Most of what exists in scholarship on African immigrant accounts for the causes of migration and the experience of migrants in the host country and the complications that result from racism, loneliness and isolation. These literary works have also been analyzed in terms of what constitutes home and identities. The most recent critical approach has been in line with some notions derived from globalization theories and postcolonial studies.

Analyses of post-nationalism, multiple, transnational or hybrid identities are usually deployed in these critical studies.⁷ Ayo Coly in *The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood* for instance critiques the post-national framework derived from globalization

⁷ Among others, I have found Ayo A. Coly, *The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood: Gender and Migration in Francophone African Literatures* (Lanham, MD: Rowmand and Littlefield, 2010) very useful for my own analytical framework in this dissertation. See Chielozona Eze, "Cosmopolitan Solidarity: Negotiating Transculturality in *Contemporary Nigerian Novels*" (*English in Africa* 32.1 (2005): 99-112. (Adjust type font here)

⁸ Trying to affirm her global identity, her "Englishness" and dissociate herself from her local Nigerian origin and identity, Buchi Emecheta condemns the inferior quality of novels written by Nigerians and argues that since she has lived longer in England, she has acquired modern and global qualities which now separate her from Nigeria: "I think, using the language every day and staying in the culture, my Africanness is, in a way, being diluted. My paperback publisher, Collins, has now stopped putting my books in the African section" (Qtd. In Chinua Achebe, *Home and Exile* (New York: Anchor, 2000).

or *mondialization* theories for reading Francophone African migrant literatures on the notions of nation-home. Operating from the theoretical frameworks of writers like Homi Bhabha, Hardt Michael and Antonio Negri, Arjun Appadurai, and Odile Cazenave, Francophone literary criticism has largely followed the trend of reading the African immigrant in fiction as an “uprooted and deterritorialized” individual no longer enslaved to the notion of belonging to a nation or identity but now viewed as a nomad, cosmopolitan and “free-floating migrant” (xiii).

Similar scenarios can be traced in some Anglophone African writers like Teju Cole and Buchi Emecheta. A reading of their work sometimes shows the traces of not wanting to belong to a single nation but multiple nations or as in the extreme case of Buchi Emecheta, once criticized by Chinua Achebe in *Home and Exile* for not wanting her novel to appear under the African section in a bookstore (71)⁸. Ayo Coly addresses in a compelling way this critical approach in her gender based reading of three francophone African migrant female writers. My dissertation further explores Coly’s critique of the reading of the African immigrant as a post-nationalist for which home has ceased to be of primary concern as would be seen in my reading of Teju Cole’s *Open City*. Thinking within the framework of Chinua Achebe’s Fanonian framed philosophy of “the psychology of the dispossessed” (*Home and Exile* 4), and his nuanced reading of a balanced relationship between local and global that considers the peculiar colonization history of sub-Saharan African immigrants, I argue that my reading of contemporary African novels of immigration problematizes the transnational or cosmopolitan ideals of globalization. I show that in these writers, African immigrants in the West despite their cosmopolitan desire are still to a considerable extent defined and constructed by nation-

home, and as much as the African immigrant is portrayed to be transnational or cosmopolitan in contemporary African migrant novels. Due to the impact of globalization, he or she is still being claimed by home or nation-state. For instance, in Teju Cole's *Open City*, the protagonist, a Nigerian immigrant, embraces multiple belonging but he is still constantly claimed by people from Nigeria and the African diaspora but not by Germany or the US. As also with Ifemelu and Obinze in *Americanah*, there is still a return, a pull-back to home.

My interest in the study and analysis of the figure of the African immigrant in the age of globalization is grounded in my observations from readings of recent migrant novels of Anglophone and Francophone migrant writers, though the body of my work will focus on Anglophone writers. My observation betrays a longing to portray transnationalism in terms of how home and identity are viewed especially as plots and characters of these fictions that traverse multiple nations. This trend and focus on the experience of the African migrant is not new in African literature.⁸ Novels by contemporary or third generation African writers-the Afropolitans as they are labeled by some critics--, who write in English narrate the experiences of African immigrants in the age of globalization.

⁸ There are number of novels by first and second-generation Francophone and Anglophone writers that address the experience of African migrants who in the case of the Francophone works usually return home but in the Anglophone example usually remain in the new home. See Ousmane Soce, *Mirages de Paris* (1937); Bernard Dadie, *Un Nègre a Paris* (1956); Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961); and Buchi Emecheta, *Second Class Citizen* (1974).

Genealogy of African Writers and Fictions

As discussed in Harry Garuba's critical work on the demarcation of literary generations, the task of delineating literary generational and thematic boundaries is fraught with indeterminacy, for "boundaries demarcating neat categorizations, therefore, literary periods and schools, are as porous as they come. As markers of general trends, however, literary generation categorizations retain some usefulness, more like provisional maps, open-ended rather than closed, always inviting revision; their reversibility inscribed, as it were, at the heart of their making" ("The unbearable lightness of being" 51). Bearing this open-ended possibility regarding thematic orientation, there is a reasonable basis for affirming that the third generation of African writers, the 21st century African migrant writers, is impelled by a transnational and cosmopolitan imagination. This global thematic imperative is necessarily conditioned by the constant movement by both Anglophone and Francophone writers between homeland and host nation and the production of their literary works in the global North, mostly in United States, France and Britain, but an overbearing imperative is the current globalization phenomenon.

Largely, my dissertation critically explores contemporary Anglophone African fictions of migration for the experience of the African immigrant vis-à-vis nation-home and identity. Driven mainly by the process of globalization with all its promises, I argue that the African immigrant fiction exposes gaps in transnational and cosmopolitan values. While I am careful to highlight the inevitable influence of globalization in defining the new canon of African literature and the general benefits of globalization for African immigrants portrayed in the examined novels, I contend with claims that the anti-nation-state practice of globalization and transnationalization fulfills promises of global capital

modernity as imagined by African immigrants in the works of the third generation Anglophone migrant writer analyzed here.

My dissertation proposes an augmented reading of these Anglophone African novels of migration-Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail*, Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Teju Cole's *Open City*, by analyzing them through the prism of book production and circulation in the era of globalization. Since globalization and postcolonial studies have led us down the path of questioning national culture in terms of monolithic visions, we find it difficult to define national literatures in a compact and rigid way. As Homi Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture*: "The very concept of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities as the grounds of cultural comparativism-are in a profound process of redefinition" (5).

Because of the global view they have as cosmopolitans, the African writers I analyze here-Chris Abani, Chika Unigwe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Teju Cole, are engaged in redefining national and transnational literature. To do this is to respond to the following questions: where is a book published? Who is the publisher and where is the publisher's location? Who is the intended reading population?⁹ The following words of Rebecca Walkowitz in "The Location of Literature: The Transnational Book and the Migrant Writer" capture my thought:

⁹ See Lokangaka Losambe's "Conclusion: African Writers and their Public." *Borderline Movements in African Fiction*. (Trenton, NJ: AWP, 2005): 163-73.

Immigrant fictions suggest that literary studies will have to examine the global writings of books, in addition to their classification, designs, publications, translations, anthologizing and reception across multiple geographies. Books are no longer imagined to exist in a single literary system but may exist, now and in the future, in several literary systems, through various and uneven practices of world circulation (528).

It is good to note however that different historical and cultural contexts inform different approaches in sub-Saharan Anglophone and Francophone African writings. For instance, British colonization did not insist on the direct embrace of the English cultural and literary ethos whereas French colonization emphasizes the assimilation of French culture and form. Negritude tried to neutralize the intimate embrace of the *metropole* by the African francophone as the context for telling African experience, but it failed because, as Cynthia R. Nielsen argues, it promoted “a reactionary racialized essentialism ...still trapped within a binary Manichean framework” (“Frantz Fanon and the Negritude Movement” 342). A similar tie with Britain is not clearly obvious with the Anglophone sub-Saharan African writers, especially in the third-generation writers. However, these influences have bearings on the ways they represent the African immigrant.

In chapter one, the fictions of Chris Abani *Becoming Abigail* (2006) and Chika Unigwe’s *Black Sisters Street* (2010), are critically analyzed in the context of the influence and consequences of globalization on sub-Saharan Africans. In the lyrical and

poetic prose novella, *Becoming Abigail*, Abani¹⁰ relates the lonely life of a teenager brought to London from Lagos who is forced into prostitution by the relatives she lives with. My reading of this novella offers insight into the violence inflicted on the female body and the connected vulnerability of African women in the face of the forces of international labor that create global demands from the West for commercial sex workers. As Fredrick Jameson argues, globalization “forced integrations of countries all over the globe into precisely that new division of labor” (“Notes on Globalization as Philosophical Issue” 57). In Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters Street* we see the sex workers from the global South imported to Belgium to serve its male sexual fantasies. But the more tragic aspect is that there is collusion between the home and self-exploiting agents in the South with architects of the transnational human trafficking trade in the West. Feminist theorists like Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russel Hochschild in their “Introduction” to *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy* blame the globalization of women’s work not only on the side effects of the First World’s dominated economic forces on the economy of the Third World and the implication of Third World governments in the immigration of women to the West to serve as maids and sex-workers but also place blame on the sexual demands of Western men: “The men in Western

¹⁰ Unlike *Becoming Abigail*, where we see a minimal demonstration of the impact of globalization on an African identity, in *Graceland*, Abani shows the impact of the global on the local identity. In *Graceland*, a coming-of-age novel set in the early 1980s Lagos, Elvis, the protagonist, does not actually explore the possibility of migrating to the US until the tail end of the plot. But in his life in Lagos, he is already living the imaginary life of the global West which demonstrates the impact of globalization on postcolonial subject identity.

countries are also, of course, directly responsible for the demand for immigrant sex workers- as well as for the sexual abuse of many migrant women who work as domestics. Why, we wondered, is there a particular demand for ‘imported’ sexual partners?” (5) The impact of globalization on the countries of the global South is at the root of this migration of women to the South as my reading of Unigwe’s novel will show.

In the second chapter of this study, I focus on how transnational immigrants are able to claim double or multiple belonging and how this impacts the construction of identity and belonging. Through the crossing of national-home boundaries to locations in the global South, African immigrants can fulfill certain dreams like education and the experience of different Western Others. But the experience is often fraught with the hostile racism and loneliness that sometimes develops and leads in some cases to a nostalgia for home. In my analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s latest novel, *Americanah* (2013), I trace out the ambiguities in the promise of globalization. What often happens to African immigrants, even when they choose to adapt to the host community is that they experience feelings of loneliness and racism which prevents them from living a stable life in the West.

In chapter three, I examine Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011). We meet Julius, Cole’s cosmopolitan protagonist who lives a nomadic life and finds himself still being “claimed” by people who share similar race and diaspora experience with him. And we learn that efforts at building global or cosmopolitan identity by a detachment from the homeland usually fail.

The dissertation will conclude with a discourse on how the embrace of global themes and cosmopolitan ideals by 21st century African migrant writers, the so-called

Afropolitans, have once again revived the questions of who is an African writer and African writings in the context of the revision of African literary canons in the global West. Despite the critical view of the process of globalization, my conclusion acknowledges the impossibility of globalization on how we construct 21st century African fictions and canons. The study of the unavoidable influence of globalization on 21st century African fictions, the consideration of the ways in which contemporary African fictions are shaping the new African literary canons, and the reflection of the potentials and pit-falls of globalization as conveyed by means of the experiences of African immigrants narrated in the fictions examined are the objects of this project.

CHAPTER 1: AFRICAN WOMEN, GLOBAL WOMEN: SELLING SEX AND THE
DECEIT OF TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION IN ABANI'S *BECOMING ABIGAIL* AND
UNIGWE'S *ON BLACK SISTERS STREET*

“She was a ghost” (*Becoming Abigail* 103)

This chapter explores questions relating to the connection between neoliberal globalization and the transnational migration of African women to countries of the global North to supply its sex labor economy. Does globalization have negative bearings on African countries? What are the implication of globalization for explaining the increase in the trafficking of African women to Europe? Transnational migration in the current dispensation of globalization highlights among others the problem of an unequal flow of people and capital from one pole of the global space to another, especially the migration and dispersal of women from the countries of the Global South to the sex labor fields in the global cities of the North¹¹. As we shall see in Teju Cole's *Open City*, African migration as it pertains to men is not particularly informed by need to overcome

¹¹ See Timothy J. Hatton and Jeffrey G. Williamson in *Global Migration and the World Economy: Two Centuries of Policy and Performance*. MIT Press, 2006 on an extensive study on the impact of global migration on migrants as well as host countries. Their book also identifies global labor movement patterns that includes north-north, south-south, and south-north migration patterns. In their important insight into the precarious working experiences of migrant labor to the Global North countries, Hannah Lewis, Peter Dwyer, Stuart Hodgkinson and Louise Waite in “Hyper-Precarious lives: Migrants, Work and Forced Labour in the Global North”, argue however that “South North flows are broadly on a par with those of South-South and North-North” (580).

economic difficulty, rather the novel's protagonist is of a middle class and impelled by cosmopolitan desires that he can afford to pursue in America. Similarly, Obinze, the male protagonist in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*'s reason for migration to Britain is not due to a dire need to seek economic elevation in the West. In both cases, the male protagonists in *Open City* and *Americanah* are already global in their imaginations and with their belonging to the middle class and exposure to the world beyond their local environment migrate to the West primarily to improve their already stable economic life. Hence in these other works of fiction, there is the absence of the economic impoverishment that conditions the desire of the women in Abani's *Becoming Abigail* and Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street*. In the texts of focus in this chapter we see a stark difference in the experiences of globalization between African men and women. The women, it appears are more prone to become victim of dehumanization on migrating to the countries of the global North.

Although, as Laura Maria Agustin reveals in *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and Rescue Industry*, poor and undocumented women from Eastern and Central Europe and Latin America as well are engaged in domestic, caring and sexual labor (3-4), a significant and growing numbers of nannies, maid and sex workers that feed and run the economies and the social life of Western cities like London, New York, Paris and Brussels are drawn from the countries of the South. Hence, my focus for most part in this dissertation are on African countries of the global South.

Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail* (2007) and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street* (2009) are two prominent literary texts in contemporary African literature of migration with attention to the new phenomenon of growth in number of female Africans

being trafficked to the North to cater to the needs of its domestic and sex labor economy. Granted that strangling economic and political landscape of their African countries of origin warrant the urgency and desperation to emigrate to the North for succor, the reduced availability of parents at home to attend to domestic needs and the enlarged hedonistic fantasies of increased financial fortunes of Western males are particularly the underpinning reasons for the increased participation of African women in the global sex trade. The growth in number of African women transported from African countries of origin to Europe and North America, hastened *inter alia* by the process of globalization, calls for analysis and interrogation of underlying factors that facilitate movement of human labor from the South to the North through the aid of globalization. Concurrent with the interrogation of the role of globalization in this trade in human labor is the questioning of the ideal of cosmopolitanism-the notion of shared humanity and hence care to see that all humans are valued for their humanity.

It is noted that the literature on the migration of labor from the periphery to the central and hegemonic global economy, pays relatively low attention to how the increase in demand for trafficked women from the developing South and Eastern Europe to cater to Western countries domestic and family needs is linked to the change in latter's family and domestic condition which creates needs for domestic help.

Social science research on roles of women in labor and impact on family have illumined the reduction in time spent at home by career driven working western European mothers/wives and the resultant choice by some women to find substitutes to perform their pre-modern assigned social roles as the major and primary caregivers to their

children¹², a choice that has in turn spiked up the demands for domestic helps which inadvertently has led to increase in trafficking of women majorly from the developing economies, including African, to the economically advanced countries in the West. Though Jo Doezeema argues that, “The campaign against “trafficking in women” has gained increasing momentum world-wide, but in particular among feminists in Europe and the United States, in the last two decades” (23), and this is noted and admired, yet there is still an ongoing exploitation of women from developing countries of the global South. It is not uncommon in some parts of the United States to have trafficked Latina as maids in the homes of some affluent Americans. In the old American South, it used to be the case that non-career white women used black Black nannies and cooks even though they were not engaged outside the house. In the era of globalization, with less hours available for domestic chores, African women and children are still being “Lured by

¹² For instance, Article 41.2 of the 1937 Irish constitution states that,

By her life in the home the woman gives to the state a support by which the common good can be achieved. The state shall therefore endeavour to ensure that mothers will not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of her duties in the home” (*Constitution of Ireland-Bunreacht Na hEireann*. http://www.constitution.org/cons/ireland/constitution_ireland-en.pdf). This Western European juridical document highlights the pre-modern feminization of home management whereby women are to be restricted as much as possible to offering household labor (including child care, housekeeping, shopping for groceries, emotional care to husbands, etc.) than seeking career path labor. Although men’s contributions have increased but women still carry out most domestic/family work across board even in contemporary times. For more on research on women and household labor in the West, see Scott Coltrane, “Research on Household Labor: Modeling and Measuring the Social Embeddedness of Routine Family Work.” *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Vol. 62, no.4 November 2000, pp.1208-1233.

promises of employment as shopkeepers, maids, seamstresses, nannies or hotel service positions in Europe” (Fitzgibbon 84). While this is not only a European affair, the need for domestic services has also risen in parts of Middle East and America, the human trafficking of Africans to Europe appears to be in higher number than to America.

Yet despite the gendered nature of the transnational migration of labor from the South to the North, the high increase in the relocation of women from the periphery to the center of the world sex economy as numerous migration studies have evinced,

What however has not been highlighted critically enough is the complexity and concrete account of primary conditions and contexts that drive the desire of African women in particular to migrate from their family and homeland to the global cities of the West. The complexity of the context that accounts for the increased movement of African women to the North is indicated and implicated in the internal and external bifurcation of the reason for the devastation of African economy. James H. Mittelman extricates globalization process from blame for the local and external causes, arguing that “if anything, globalization blurs many dualities-state and non-state, legal and illegal, public and private, and so on” (“Globalization: An Ascendant Paradigm?” 30). While acknowledging Mittelman’s effort at complicating the simple binaries argument for the adverse effect of globalization on African economies, I nevertheless argue to the contrary by maintaining that the globalization process has consequences on African local economies and social realities which finds crystallization in the increase in mobility across continental borders of Africa and Europe.

While globalization theorists may be divided on the role of globalization in the creation of the crisis in Africa, my study shows that there is a clear connection between

the poor economic conditions on the continent and the economic modalities of globalization resulting in the unequal growth in the economies of the economic advanced countries of the North and developing economies of the South. The globalization of economic forms has not been helpful to Africa's economic development and the common formula in which it is dispensed, the numerous financial aid-loans and grants. As the African economist and a former consultant for the World Bank Dambisa Moyo argues, they "have hampered, stifled and retarded Africa's development" (*Dead Aid* 9). The basis of my study is premised on the two models for explaining the African reality as delineated by Sankaran Krishna in *Globalization and Postcolonialism*: "the modernization/globalization and the underdevelopment/postcolonialism" models (41). A reading of African economic experience from the modernization/globalization viewpoint is simplistic as it would imply that globalization has integrated Africa into global markets and opened-up possibilities for development and revival of its tottering economies through implementations of fiscal policies imposed by global financial institutions. But an examination of the role of the World Bank and the IMF, and the liberalization of capital markets from the underdevelopment/postcolonialism paradigm would suggest otherwise. As Krishna further argues, the era of globalization "has actually seen a tremendous increase in the degree of political interference by institutions such as the IMF and its Structural Adjustment Programs on the economies of third-world countries, done in the name of defending free-trade principles!" (45).

The Structural Adjustment Program imposed on developing African economies by these global multinational financial institutions as conditions for granting them loans to service their loans is stringent. It demands tightening of the financial belt and comes

with the implication of the withdrawal of welfare and social support programs for poor populations. This is accompanied by a liberalization of trade, which allows a less restricted flow of manufactured products and professional support of developing world economies, which hinders any fair competition of local production materials with incoming ones from the developed economies of the North. Krishna's words capture the gist of the stifling conditions for lending financial support to these countries: "In sum, a contradictory set of policies (mandated by the IMF) led to the liberalization of capital accounts and the removal of exchange controls in emerging markets, while requiring them to exercise tight fiscal and monetary discipline, leading to high interest rates domestically. Alongside fixed exchange rates to maintain the value of their currency" (56).¹³

These imposed financial conditions have dire consequences on global South economies as could be seen in the African countries that foreground the two contemporary African literary texts under analysis in this chapter. The true consequences of implementations of IMF programs-whether their implementations were skewed by receiving countries or not, or blame shifted from the IMF to countries that supposedly failed to follow through with the formula given-is the difficult life faced by the populace

¹³ Joseph E. Stiglitz also describes these difficult conditionality and the incongruity character of Bretton Wood institutions program with its original progressive intentions: "Founded on the belief that there is a need for international pressure on countries to have more expansionary economic policies-such as increasing expenditures, reducing tax, or lowering interest rates to stimulate the economy-today the IMF typically provides funds only if countries engage in policies like cutting deficits, raising taxes, or raising interest rates that lead to a contraction of the economy" (*Globalization and its Discontents* 12-13).

of developing countries to sustain a meaningful social and economic life due to job cuts, salary cuts, high cost of living, etcetera. And it matters less to the conscience of the leaders of the financial institutions if the programs fail, because, as the Nobel prize winner in Economics Joseph E. Stiglitz explains, “unless there is some form of debt forgiveness, the poor people in the developing world still must repay the loans” (*Globalization and Its Discontents* 8). In the process, the hands of the political leadership are tied because of the indirect control on governorship by officials of multinational global institutions through their stringent fiscal policies. In an era where free market economic ideology is promoted by developed Western countries, Stiglitz adds, “The IMF and the World Bank became the new missionary institutions, through which these ideas were pushed on the reluctant poor countries that often badly needed their loans and grants” (13). Like the missionary bodies of colonial era, the global financial institutions are integral to the conditions created by the process of globalization to create needs and desires in Africans and others as well from developing economies to travel to the North to seek social and economic respite. The desire will also be examined in chapter two, this time not by Africans from the poor class but of middle class driven by cosmopolitan desires and education though the unstable social and political situation at home hasten that drive and desire to migrate to the North.

The literary texts examined in this chapter reflect the existential reality of a failed economic and political status of the African states from where certain women originate and migrate. The implication of a global liberal capitalist economy glimmers in these failed states, and there is an uncritical and often false assumption that overcoming economic stagnation and fulfillment of dreams of quality life lie majorly in migration to

the North. The texts also illustrate how local and international agents of migration work hand in hand to exploit the economic poverty status of certain female subjects, a condition created in part by the process and consequences of contemporary globalization.

The literary texts critically engaged with in this chapter do not only illustrate how globalization and the West are at the root of mostly misconceived and misdirected migration of African women to the West, but they also paradoxically and simultaneously bring to fore the resilience and agency of African women migrants in the often-mitigating existential human conditions they find themselves in the metropolitan cities of the West. Therefore, in addition to exposing the implication of global forces in the exportation and exploitation of African women in the Western global cities, this chapter offers a detailed analysis of experiences of African migrant sex workers in the West- the complexity of their simultaneous subjugation and manifestation of subjectivity. Ultimately, my analysis indicates how the subjugation of African women in the Western cities spotlights their tenacity and inherent human dignity despite their subjectification, that is, their identity and image as defined or constructed by others.

African Women and the Deceit of Globalization

Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail* and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street* are two contemporary African fictions of migration that share the theme of transnational migration of African women to the West in search of better lives over and better than what is available in their home countries. Abigail, the protagonist in Abani's bildungsroman relocates to London on false promises and hopes of getting good education and job that will eventually empower her to transform her limited economic

condition and support her disheveled father whose enduring mourning of his dead wife has become a source of worries. Sisi and other female protagonists in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street* are taken from Nigeria to Belgium by Dele, an African agent of the human trafficking business with a central operating base in Europe. What is common to both texts are the promises of gaining economic power by means of transnational relocation to Europe. While in the case of Abigail, there is a deceit in the way the purpose of migration is portrayed, hidden behind her in-law's promise of getting her better education and economic status is the malicious plan to exploit her sexually; in the case of the lady protagonists in *On Black Sisters Street*, the nature of the work in Europe is revealed to some of them even though with a lot of deception on the details. In both literary narratives, deceit frames the promises of social and economic advancement. I call this deceit of globalization.

The impact of the ambivalence of globalization is emphasized in the two literary texts. On one hand, a reading of these African fictions offers a possibility of tracing the connection between global migration with its claim of economic empowerment to poor African women and the actual traumatic reality of the rape of their human rights. On the other hand, the fictions demonstrate, perhaps inadvertently, how these African women, like the perennial phoenix, manage to emerge with human integrity and agency from their deprived subject position. Though from a middle class, Adichie's protagonist in *Americanah* also reflect the consequence of global migration on women from developing African countries. Ifemelu struggled with raising enough money to pay for tuition and board and had to engage in a shameful sex act with a rich white man. The trauma that results from the dehumanizing experience spurs her on to write on her experience on

blogs which opened the door to fame and money. Despite this common trait shared with Adichie's female protagonist in *Americanah*, the African women in the novels that are engaged with in this chapter are more constrained by consequences of poor economic conditions than Ifemelu in *Americanah*.

The literary texts analyzed in this chapter will equally raise questions on the promises of globalization and its reality and cost to social, moral and economic fabric of the global South, in particular, African nation states. While this chapter is not necessarily a full-fronted slam of neo-liberal capitalism- though in a subtle way it critiques and challenges it, it however questions and contexts the impression that the spread of western democracy cum globalization of neoliberal economic practices to the global South would undermine the preponderance of autocratic powers in the region and *ipso facto* liberate and empower citizens of the region's nation-states, African nation-states in particular¹⁴. In the existentiality of life in the global South as captured in the texts under focus here, it appears the global economic, under the aegis of the West helps create, albeit, in collusion with postcolonial nation-states leaders, unstable economic and political conditions that in turn prepare the ground for the nurturing in postcolonial subjects the culture of material

¹⁴ It is established that African countries perhaps suffer the most political setbacks in comparison with other nation-states that make up the Global South; about half of the continent operate under autocratic regimes which to a large extent is responsible for her insertion in a cycle of dysfunction- grim economy, endemic corruption, poor infrastructures, etc. Moyo Dambisa highlights the disturbing state of Africa in a series of questions she raised in *Dead Aid*: "Why is it that Africa, alone among the continents of the world, seems to be locked into a cycle of dysfunction? Why is it that out of all the continents in the world Africa seems unable to convincingly gets its foot on the economic ladder? Why in a recent survey did seven out of top ten 'failed states' hail from that continent?" (6).

consumerism that they assumed could only be realized and sustained by migration to prosperous global cities of the West.

As a follow up to the preceding claim and to aid clarification of purpose, this chapter attempts to respond to the following questions: to what extent is the process of contemporary globalization implicated in the failed economic and political projects of global South? How has the neoliberal globalization-aided gloomy existential condition of failed postcolonial nation-states infused into postcolonial subjects' desires for migration to the cities of the global North and fulfil elusive economic and social prosperity? In the process of contesting claims of globalization, how do the literary texts treated here unveil hidden strength and agency in their otherwise exploited and trafficked migrant women protagonists? My argument in this chapter responds to the questions raised and argues that neoliberal globalization is not free of some blame in accounting for the current economic chaos and social instabilities of the African postcolonial nation-states of the twenty first century. Globalization under the hegemony of the global North offers and nurtures in postcolonial subjects a false assumption of discovering paradise by migration to global cities of the North when in actual fact, despite a few relative economic progresses that are identifiable, the dispersal of African women to the North for all intent and purposes appears primarily to satiate the sexual fantasies of inclined men in the cities of the West.

Chris Abani's Abigail

Upon its publication in 2006, Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail* received several international literary acclaims, including a New York Times Editors' Choice award, a

Chicago Reader Critic's Choice award and listed a finalist for the 2007 Pen Beyond the Margin award. *Becoming Abigail* is a story of psychological and perceptual development, a becoming, the unearthing and unveiling of the often shrouded and elided complex identity of sex labor victims, as embodied in the life of a teenage girl, Abigail Tansi who was deceitfully transported from Lagos to London by her in-law for prostitution. Raised by her father after the death of her mother, Abigail, whom she is named after, the young Abigail's life is haunted by memories of her dead mother whose demise also renders Abigail father's life miserable; this familial condition impacts negatively on the life of the young teen and distorts her healthy growth as her day to day life reflects a depressed mind. Thinking her life will benefit from relocation to Europe, instead her life in London turns even more tragic as she turns to a victim of male violence and sexual exploitation orchestrated by Peter, her cousin's husband. She however transforms into a woman who makes her own choice, despite the subjective context she finds herself by freely giving her body and heart to Derek, a white social worker.

Globalization, Migration, and Illusion

Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail* paints a generic portrait of women trafficked from developing nations to developed ones due partly to the consequence of the process of neo-liberal globalization and the connected false fantasy of a free and progressive Western world this global phenomenon helps create. Abani's Abigail Tansi concretely highlights the lie behind this view of the West as a paradisiac domicile, particularly for deracinated African women. In the imagination of people from the developing economies of Africa, migrating to the West is a movement toward peace and prosperity lacking at

home countries but in reality, the dream world of the West becomes a cite for infliction of pain, violence and mental abuse and a location conducive to the thriving of the power and structure that turn these women into objects of abuse. As Ashley Dawson argues,

Becoming Abigail offers important insights into the material and psychological mechanisms through which human trafficking works in the contemporary global economy. Key to the functioning of the shadow economy, the novel suggests, are the forms of psychological abuse and manipulation to which deracinated people are subjected by those who control and profit from them. (180)

The subjection of these women to trauma by those who manage the system and those who benefit from the trade is tightly connected to the extreme local condition marked by poor economy and leadership. I beg to differ slightly with Dawson's position that "Although it focuses explicitly on sexual slavery, Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail* does not dwell on the background context behind human trafficking" (183). A careful reading shows that Abani indicates the narrative's failed nation-state economy and collapsed family structure as background context to the trafficking in women from the global South to the global North's sex labor market.

The social and economic conditions are part of background contexts that necessitate the need for poor and oppressed African women to migrate abroad to seek succor and the transnational dislocation that follows are induced and facilitated by process of neo-liberal globalization. In one instance of a positive perception of migration to the West, Abigail's father opines that all young girls Peter exports to London are the fortunate ones with guaranteed access to the good life: "Imagine how lucky those children are!" (58). However, Abani's character, Abigail, offers a viable opportunity to

advance a counter claim that these women rather than experience promise of globalization turn out instead as victims of the global trade in sex, a phenomenon that highlights the inhuman face of globalization. These women are subjected to violent sexual exploitation by men operating from a certain position of social and economic influence, but as the case of Abigail also shows, these women are paradoxically-by their subversive actions, capable of creating from their subject position a relative modicum of agency and power, pointers to their dignity, a condition that invites recognition of their otherwise occluded and unrecognized humanity.

The postcolonial African society Abigail inhabits is a botched one. Her domestic space is limiting and emotionally choking, the larger Nigerian society that frames her quotidian existence is even more hostile. Living at home with her father after her withdrawal from a boarding school, Abigail is constantly exposed to economic poverty, but she does her best to support her ailing father under this exhausting condition. Poverty is written all over her home and environment but for the most part, she can contain the situation despite the added emotional burden that her father's unstable state imposes. The home ambience is represented in images of systemic failure and death. Readers can glean the decaying community from her imaginations, sometimes based on fantasy, sometimes on reality and more often a mix of both which illustrate the fragmented mind and life of Abigail. One can get a glimpse of the unfriendly environment from the image of her home surrounding, the "abandoned truck" around which all kinds of plants grow wild, a representation of the community and country: "A thing was left where it broke and the land, the forest, soon claimed it back, giving it new meaning, until one day you simply forgot that it was the rusting carcass of a once red truck" (36). The sense of abandonment

and decay due to neglect is also captured in her imagination during her commute back home from school when her eyes caught sight of what looked like a dead baby lying in the middle of the road. Granted it was a mirage in this instance, however, it nevertheless suggests that it is not “unusual thought in this country where the dead littered the streets of big towns and cities like so much garbage” (51). The references to images of a festering physical environment points to a society that is undergoing death throes. This society portends disaster for its citizens, especially young and growing ones like Abigail who have no social and economic support.

In addition to the metaphoric environmental references indicating the dysfunctional country in which Abigail is located are other symbolic references to be discovered by a careful reading of Abani’s experimental narratives. For instance, books, a significant pointer to understanding Abigail and the troubled state of her country further augment the claim that her African society is on the cusp of economic and political precipice. A major book reference is Ayi Kwe Armah’s *Fragments* (1970)¹⁵ which Derek gives to Abigail at the beginning of their relationship in London. The novel, Derek says, is to “make her feel at home” (35) in London, the location of her repeated sexual abuse and space that constitutes disconnection from her original home. Home is a contested subject in an age of migration, hence as a fluid notion, Abigail could make claims to more than one home. That point being made, it is reasonable to conclude that neither

¹⁵ Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Fragment* (Heinmann, 1970. 1995) tells the story of Bakoo, a young Ghanaian returnee from United States. On his return, he becomes a subject of the friction between social and economic expectations of his family and country.

Abigail's current home of migration nor home of origin truly serve as a protective abode for her. Abigail's Nigerian home failed to offer her a positive space for joy and growth, her memories of it is unpleasant.

Derek and generally the West in turn have perceptions of Nigeria and other African countries mainly in terms of backwardness and darkness. This notion is contained in Derek's inscription in the copy of Armah's *Fragment* he gifted to Abigail: "Gentle Abigail, This book will show you that even though you come from a dark continent place, you can escape your fate" (90). Two important notions perhaps deserving of additional comments are derived from Derek's words and thoughts: first, the reference to Africa, where Abigail hails from as "dark continent" and second, possibility of escaping fatal fate that this dark place signifies.¹⁶

Darkness and fatalism are key Hegelian notions Derek associates with Africa and Abigail here. To say it superficially, darkness and fatalism are signifiers of the backward

¹⁶ References to Africa as a "dark continent" abound in classical Western texts. Chinua Achebe responds to this notion in his famous chancellor's lecture delivered at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in 1975: "Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality. The book opens on the River Thames, tranquil, resting, peacefully 'at the decline of day after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks.' But the actual story will take place on the River Congo, the very antithesis of the Thames. The River Congo is quite decidedly not a River Emeritus. It has rendered no service and enjoys no old-age pension. We are told that 'Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world.'" ("An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' (1785).

¹⁸ See Olufemi Taiwo, "Exorcising Hegel's Ghost: Africa's Challenge to Philosophy." *African Studies Quarterly*, vol.1, no. 4, 1998, p.9.

civilization and passivity often associated with Black Africa by European colonial masters and intellectuals. Hegel for instance claims in *The Philosophy of History*, that

Africa proper, that is Africa “South of the Sahara,” “is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night” (195). It is important to note that Derek, a “descendant” of Hegel, to borrow the word of the African philosopher Olufemi Taiwo¹⁸, not only identifies Africa in terms of darkness but an escape from Africa as Abigail’s only hope of avoiding the unavoidable social and cultural regression European colonial oppressors associate with “dark” Africa. Like his ancestors, the British colonial masters, Derek perhaps unconsciously can only define the Other place in relation to the West in terms of lacking or absence which suggests the need to escape to the West, a place of light or enlightenment. However, a contradiction of assumption and reality is what is discovered as we examine Abigail’s experience in the West. Looking at the picture holistically, neither her African home nor the home she migrates to in Europe offers her “light” in forms of material and emotional progress. Any positive image we construe from her character is personally attained regardless of the space she is situated.

What Derek also fails to note in defining Africa in terms of fragments and darkness is the role his own home continent Europe played in what the continent of Africa has become both in Europe or west imagination and in reality. Centuries ago, his British ancestors encroached on the so-called “dark continent” in their search for human and natural resources to build and develop the economy of Europe. Abani makes a subtle reference to this fact in an unexpected moment in the narrative when Derek’s wife, Molly catches him and Abigail having sex in their matrimonial home. Molly comes out of the bedroom to the kitchen to get more sugar to sweeten the cocoa drink Derek made for her

only to walk into her husband and Abigail in the act of adultery on the kitchen table. Abani introduces this section by a veiled reference to the European destruction of African pristine kingdoms and way of life for economic purpose by act of colonization: “And how many kingdoms had been lost for sugar?” (107). In actuality, many African kingdoms that thrived prior to European travels across the ocean to colonize the continent were devastated and have vanished by act of colonization and trans-Atlantic slave trade. This aspect of thriving African kingdoms that pre-existed the invasion and colonization of the continent by Europeans from the 19th century is usually left out or at best vaguely referenced when the history of African underdevelopment is written or talked about. The colonization of Africa took away power and the potential of pre-colonial African kingdoms and this lack of power defined Africa in the colonial and postcolonial periods.

As Walter Rodney argues in his critical and controversial book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, “When one society finds itself forced to relinquish power entirely to another society that in itself is a form of underdevelopment”(116). With the loss of political power, African society also lost control of how her natural resources are managed. The “darkness” that Derek associates with Africa that is her “underdevelopment” is not unconnected with the devastation of her kingdom in his ancestors’ search for “sugar,” a metonymy for Africa’s natural wealth to fuel Europe’s burgeoning industry and economy. With the loss of power, “the ultimate determinant in human society” Rodney continues, Africa lost the capacity to determine its route to development which would have been pegged onto her vast natural resources that the colonialist ripped out of her.

The echo and consequences of the initial military invasion and conquest of Africa are heard and noticeable in post-colonial Africa by reference to the failure of African nation states to turn into successful democracy on gaining independence from European colonists. The autocratic and corrupt leaders and the poverty that follows their misrule is often made possible because Europe and America usually look the other way or aid despotic African leaders in decimating Africa politically and economically. In the wake of economic globalization as midwifed by global financial bodies like the World Bank and the IMF, maladministration by many African leaders acting as stooges of the West has fragmented Africa and made it practically “dark.” There are no explicit references to how the West played a role in the political and economic decay of African states, but a close reading of Abani’s text do strongly suggest that economic neo-liberal globalization fails to deliver on its promises of progress in the case of most African countries; and its failure is the failure of European modernity and civilization on which liberal globalization is built. Echoing Aime Cesaire, Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni in his Preface to *Empire, Global Coloniality and African Subjectivity* draws attention to “this reality of a modernity and civilization that was incapable of solving modern problems” (vii). Instead of progress and development, pains and poverty define the experiences of many African countries in the new era of globalization.

The societal decay that emerges translates to poverty for most people and this state of insufficiency soon plants in the mind of families the desire and efforts to escape to foreign countries, especially countries in the West for a better life. As it is also the case in Chika Unigwe’s *Black Sisters Street*, the economic brokenness and collapse of political structures in African countries on the heels of global economic programs

introduced and administered by financial agents of globalization give rise to a desire for survival and progress somewhere else, particularly in the global North. Preceding flight from home to the West, the process and consequences of globalization generate in Africans a hunger and desire to migrate to Europe and America. Similar to “the slavery of desire” (107) Abani mentions in reference to the English desire for African natural resources to develop Britain, the dehumanizing situation at home coupled with a strong suggestion by projection of globalization that the West epitomizes the fulfilment of promises of globalization gives birth to an enslaving desire in postcolonial African subjects to migrate to the West to partake in dreams of economic empowerment. This is also evident in Adichie’s *Americanah* which will be examined in chapter 2.

London is the primary location in *Becoming Abigail* that provides avenue to benefiting from the dividends of globalization in terms of economic and political desires. An agent of the global power here is Peter, Abigail’s in-law. He is a perfect example in the minds of people at home of “a successful businessman in London” who returns “to the village from London once a year” to share gains of migration, by taking “one young relative back” on each return (57). It is striking and significant to note that each time he returns to London with a relative, it is usually a girl he leaves with. This consistency reflects the gendered nature of migration from the South to the North that is the “feminization of migration”¹⁷. Peter claims that Mary, his wife, requests for her cousin

¹⁷ See Patricia R. Pessar and Sarah J. Mahler, “Transnational Migration: Bringing Gender in.” *The International Migration Review*. Transnational Migration: International Perspectives, vol. 37, no. 3, Fall, 2003, pp. 812-846.

Abigail to come to complete her education in London, and her unknowing father in a sacrificial gesture of letting go of his precious daughter remarks positively, “your life will be better...London will give you a higher standard of education and living” (64). Despite his high reliance on Abigail for his day to day survival, he is willing to make the sacrifice because of the promise of good life migration to Europe holds, it indicates an escape from the death and decay at home. He imagines that all the female relatives that went back with Peter in the past are living the dream of economic success that the western world offers; “imagine how lucky those children are,” (58) he says of all the girls who have been opportune to leave for London in the past even though there is nothing tangible to refer to as proof for this assumption. But the precocious and quick-thinking girl that she is, Abigail has always suspected Peter’s claim and even while still enjoying the pretentious care and attention from Peter during early stage of her arrival in London, before he manifests his true exploitative goal, Abigail asks Peter, “What happened to all of the other kids you took back? I haven't seen any. He smiled, You’ll find out soon” (84)

Abigail’s question is an important one for a number of reasons. It draws attention to the actual experience of migrants enticed by promises of greener pastures abroad. What really happens to migrants once they arrive in the global cities of the North? Also, it asks us to query the morality behind human trafficking, especially in teenage girls. What Abigail question also raises is the invisibility or silence about victims of human trafficking; until recently, enough focus was not placed on details of travails that accompany the migration of women in migration studies scholarship. DeLaet makes this clear: "The invisibility of women in international migration scholarship does not correspond to the reality of international migration." ("Introduction: The Invisibility of

Women in Scholarship on International Migration” 13)

Families of “successful” female migrants to the North are content that their daughters are abroad making and sending money home but often have no clue what exactly they do and experience once they arrive in the global cities of the North. Abigail offers for our perusal and judgement the coyness about migrant experiences in the age of globalization and the magnitude of dissimulation agents of migration from the South to the North are capable of performing. The remainder of my focus and analysis of *Becoming Abigail* in this chapter will lead us to finding out the complex experience of a teen migrant to Europe. We will find out in Abigail a subject who experiences fragmentations by ways of loneliness, violence, sexual exploitation and how in spite of these harrowing experiences “becomes” a subjectivity, an individual with agency and voice. She navigates her painful experiences in London through seemingly self-destructive ritual of tattooing, bodily mapping, memory retrieval and sexual engagement.

Conclusively, I claim, as I will also do about some characters in Unigwe’s *Black Sisters Street* that dislocation of African women to the North by way of migration, deceptive in manner, discloses how promises of globalization are not always kept in view of the dehumanization of African women in the West. Again, my analysis will not stop at the negative consequences, rather, it will go further to show the transformation of the victims of sex trafficking into subjectivity with agency and voice. Judith Butler’s theory of subjection will serve as a theoretical framework for reading Abani’s Abigail as an ambivalent subject whose subjection by the controlling male power helps create her subject position and agency.

Global Trajectory of Sexual Exploitation of Abigail

The narrative's two temporal segments, the "Now" and "Then" describe both the exterior and internal effects of sexual exploitation of Abigail. Emotional traumas resulting from Abigail's loss of her mother and her father's failure to handle the situation properly are carefully unfolded to readers in details that include her bizarre rituals, invocation of memories of her mother and body scarifications intended to engage, control and cement emotional fragmentation unleashed on her innocent and growing mind. This condition constitutes the background to her migration to London through the manipulation of Peter, her in-law.

In London, Abigail's sexual abuse whose beginnings date back to Nigeria takes on a more intense violent turn which she responds to as she did in Nigeria by engaging in rituals of tattooing and body mapping which represent a liberating action for her. She also navigates her traumatic experiences by her recourse to books-cosmopolitan novels and poetry. Bringing to reality Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's dream "that poetry being a universal possession of mankind" and should be accessible to all by translation, Abigail reads "old Chinese poetry in translation...mostly from Emperor Wu of Han, dripping melancholy and loss" (*Becoming Abigail* 23) which match her own experience. Her reading of these literary works not only suggests Abigail's cosmopolitan appropriation but also helps her to alleviate and make sense of her emotional and physical pains.

Amoral and inordinate desires for Abigail's body by men, familiar and strange alike constitute the malevolent force imposed on her. The male characters, her father, Peter, her in-law, Edwin, her cousin and Derek, her British lover seek satisfaction for their quotidian pleasure needs from the body of the teenager, Abigail. Sometimes the

needs are psychical and emotional and sometimes they are physical and material in their constellation.

The lapse and depreciation in his fatherly role takes a moral dimension as highlighted in his suggestive gaze and attitude toward Abigail as well as his failure to notice an in-family threat to her sexual innocence. Abigail was often troubled by her father's lurid stare at her body, "the expression she saw on his face" (12), an "expression" she notices for the first time when she was eight (13), when her father got drunk and loud during one of the several moments he remembers and mourns his dead wife. She tries to diminish the guilt that rises from his amoral gaze at her by placing the blame on the emotional effect of the jazz music he is dancing to but knew "This thing with her father, however, was something else, Abigail suspected, something dead and rotting" (14). A charge of incest is subtly alluded to in Abigail's evaluation and judgement of her father's awkward stare at her body. As with a number of other instances in the fiction, Abigail's father identifies her daughter with his dead wife, and in the moment of weakness, it appears he sees a younger but growing version of his wife's body and actually wishes the daughter is the wife. Judging from Abigail's internal voice, the only reason restraining him from preying on her is probably because of her young age, albeit, he patiently waits in due time for her to grow to maturity. Abigail was aware of her father's sense of loss and pain, but "also something else: a patience, a longing. The way she imagined a devoted bonsai grower stood over a tree" (15).

In other words, Abigail is aware of something unpleasant and bizarre, indeed sinister in the manner her father often stares at her and thinks about her. She also takes note of this weird situation from her father's emotional reaction to Peter's suggestion that

she goes back to London with him as already discussed previously in this chapter. Even as he argues the case for her to leave him behind and migrate to London for a better life, Abigail recognizes a distinct evidence of her father's struggle with uncanny feelings for her that made her recoil her body defensively from his as from an invading threat. As she bares it out in her thoughts, there is a sense of pain at losing her comforting presence to Peter and London, but "there was also the faintest shadow in his eyes, one that revealed rather than occluded. She shivered and covered herself, arms and legs locked" (64). She switches her body to safe mode as if she perceives a threat to her body coming from her father. These moments of insecurity in the presence of her father, issuing from a seeming desire to control and take possession of her body constitutes a violence on her psyche even if the ultimate target is her body.

Peter goes further by assaulting Abigail not only psychologically but physically as well. As a twelve-year-old and a bridesmaid in his wedding to Mary, Peter walks into the bathroom where Abigail is taking a pee and sexually assaults her. Emboldened by his status as a successful business who lives in the West and who "always takes one young relative back to London as well" (57-58), Peter the pedophile looks down on Abigail, a minor, from a position of power to prey on her sexually, but Abigail converts her weak position to one of resistance and power as she not only refuses to acknowledge the successful businessman status Peter flaunts to intimidate other young girls into the erotic Other, but fearlessly dares to stare at him straight in the eye even as "he kissed her, his finger exploring her" (56). Peter the sexual predator of teenage girls will go further with his sexual exploration and exploitation of Abigail after he exports her to London where he violently restrains her freedom and inadvertently awakens in her boldness and strength

that can be likened to the agency demonstrated in her mother as she recalls from stories and memories of her.

Abigail has a conflicted attitude towards memories of her mother. With her father, the memories of her loss turn him into a pathetic and sorrowful man and arouse in him unpleasant thought towards his daughter. This has negative effects on Abigail's psyche because she becomes an object of a forbidden desire. In Abigail, memories of her mother create a sense of fear and loneliness, but also a sense of inspiration to resist male violence. She sees herself mentally as a replica of her mother who is "known to confront wife beaters and explain to them, quietly and politely, that if they didn't change she would cut off their penises," "a woman who was feared by most men for her independent spirit; who at thirty-five became a judge, and set up the first free women's advocacy group" (37-38). She collects and creates memories of her mother, internalizes them and after filling herself with them makes them concrete by tracing "their outlines on her skin with soft fingers, burning them in with the heat of her loss, tattooing them with a need as desperate as it was confused" (38). These acts are her mental effort to imbibe her mother's strong personality. Hence, "she was always Abigail. Yet not" (38). The memories and loss of her mother haunts her psychologically and physically and her response and resistance to this is in her act of violence on the same body and mind that is violated and haunted. She constantly fights to regain her freedom and human dignity by what appears on the surface as violence on her body, in the way she maps her experiences through serial act of self-inscribed personal tattoos, and by the act of this seemingly self bodily infliction, Abigail subverts the power that subjects her and paradoxically assert her agency.

Abani's "Abigail": Subjection, Subversion, and Subjectivity

Critical readings of Abani's *Becoming Abigail* within the tragic context of sexual exploitation of the female protagonist by the novella's male characters and how this sexual and human exploitations translate to what Sam Lipsyte describes as experience of "terror and loneliness" (*New York Times Book Review*) for Abigail are plausible readings because there are logical bases in the narrative for making and sustaining these conclusions. However, such restrictive or narrow readings come at a huge cost of glossing over fresh insight the novelette sheds on the concurrent existence of human agency and subjectivation in the character of the protagonist. In other words, the simultaneous possession of agency or voice, while occupying the site of a "powerless" subject. It may appear to un-informed minds that anyone in a state of subjection, more so, dislocated women exploited for sexual trade can make a claim to agency in such state. As Ashley Dawson notes, "*Becoming Abigail* represents the struggle for agency of those who are rendered human cargo" (181). Abigail's character contends the assumption that being in a state of subjection precludes possibilities of asserting agency.

While on the surface, Abigail appears to uncritical readers as a figure of subjection because of all the external violence and control over her life, a deeper look at her actions will suggest a capacity to act in this subjected situation with integral intent and actual control and management of her behavior. A perception and a reading of the current global North-South migration of women only in view of them as objects of sexual exploitation is a narrow one and creates a risk of ignoring the underlying strength that these women demonstrate, even from a victim-subject position they inhabit. What now follows in the section of the chapter dealing with Abani's *Becoming Abigail* will show

how in her position of subjection to a male power, the female protagonist is able to establish her subjectivity by way of subversive corporeal and psychical actions. The subjection of Abigail's body creates a site for her resistance and empowerment as a subject with agency; this ambivalent and paradoxical condition in turn bring to life her humanity. How do we access this "becoming"? How do we make a claim for agency and freedom in a character dominated by the vicious and violent power of another?

On one hand, trafficking African women for sex work or service in Europe undermines the right of these women to the ownership and control of their body, the freedom to choose to give away or withhold their body from another; on the other hand, the subjective process they painfully endure from being bodily enslaved strangely offers an avenue for these subjects' assertion of power and resistance by actions that subverts the same power that subjects them. This ambivalent movement is demonstrated in the duality of the control and violence on Abigail's body by men who had dealings with her and her resistance and undermining of this bodily control symbolized in the tattoo she inscribes on it. The scarification of her body seems to help her efforts on liberation from forces that seem to take it over: the haunting ghostly memories of her mother and the sexual exploitation by men.

The Body as a Location for Resistance and Agency

Contending against the erasure of her humanity by way of male infliction of violence on her body propels Abigail to engage in seemingly self-inflicted violence on her body but which in fact is a symbolic source of her self-liberation and expression of agency. In other words, instead of seeing her frequent body laceration as self-hatred, we

are encouraged to read it as a self-writing into a position of power and agency. In “Negotiating Freedom on Scarred Body” Critic Francesca Giommi calls our attention to the link between body laceration and liberation in Abani’s fictions which helps assert a claim to the body as location for establishing subjectivity for women under the controlling power of men behind sexual exploitation of their body. Giommi explains how in Abani’s works, infliction of pain on the body serves the double function of expiation of sin and corporeal liberation from ghostly possessions by her past:

This painful self-mutilation is ever present in Abani’s fiction, with the scope, on the one hand, to satisfy the need for self-punishment and sin-expiation, and on the other, to stress the corporeality of the characters, to escape the ghost-like existence and social marginalization to which most of them are condemned.

Through the impression of distinguishable marks on their own body, they assert their right to exist in themselves, blood and flesh, exalting the body’s capacity for both ecstasy and pain, which Abani is a master in conveying. (178)

She re-establishes right over her violently taken body in the very act of self-inflicted body scarifications, her tattoos. The act translates to an emblematic retaking of her self-dignity from the men and socioeconomic system that violently seize it. The “becoming” in *Becoming Abigail*, I argue, also indicates a change from the anonymity of the woes of a sexually exploited woman to an unveiling of her capacity for agency and freedom, a capacity that reminds us of her humanity. In agreement with social critics Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild’s assertion, I argue that prior to seeking for social justice and solutions to their “sexploitation,” “we need to see these women as full human beings” (*Global Woman* 13). In other words, a demonstration of the agency of

these women suggest their inherent humanity in its fullness even as it is occluded by dehumanization through sexual violence. *Becoming Abigail* suggests that sexually exploited women are not limited by their subjectivation but aided by it to enact strong will, spirit and power, all significations of being human. My claims are not new on the ambivalence of individual subjectivation and subject empowerment of sexually exploited women, but hope they contribute to the ongoing conversation on the nature of subjectivation and human freedom and agency, especially in the context of contemporary African fiction on the topic.

A feminist reading of Chris Abani's text that follows is conditioned by Judith Butler's theoretical framework on subject formation drawn from her engagement with ideas of Foucault, Freud and Althusser. Butler argues in *The Psychic Life of Power* that social power, in this case the dominant male power has ambivalent consequences on subject formation. She articulates a suppressive power of modernity social discourse as a paradox. Subject formation is dependent on subjective force interpellated by the patriarchal society. The same power that subjugates the female is the power that inspires her desires and cultivate her subjectivity. Through the internalization of the male constructed social ethos, the female externalizes her voice and identity. It appears on surface that the subject works against her own existence by embracing the lethal force of the dominant power but the very act of the internalize violation is what produces power in the subjugated female. The ambivalence of the theoretical framework offered by Butler is captured in one of the questions she asked: "If subordination is the condition of possibility for agency, how agency might be thought in opposition to the forces of subordination?" (10). Indeed, how does one make sense of defining agency as a

consequence of subjection when subjection in itself is destructive in objective sense? The subject in question for Butler constitutes a site of “alteration,” a place of contradiction, of paradoxical development. The internalization of subjection by the subject of sexual violation in the case of our subject of analysis offers a transformation of subjection into power. Interrogating Hegel’s transition from “Lordship and Bondage” to “The Freedom of Self-Consciousness” in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Butler traces how self-subjection is “a form of stubbornness (eigensinnigkeit)”, how this subject enacts some atom of “self-will” but one which is nevertheless still a form of servitude” (42-3). This double-fold movement is identifiable in Abigail, servitude and self-will exist one and at the same time and produces a subjectivity.

To comprehend the way this coming-of-age novella amplifies the paradox of intuiting derivation of power and agency from a weakened subject position of the protagonist, we have to place in view the stylistic form of the narrative as symbolic of the double fold nature of its thematic fulcrum. Drawing attention to the empowerment that inheres in a victim of sex-trafficking, the narrative form fluctuates temporally between “then” and “now” which suggests how the protagonist sees herself in the past and present, a perception in a state of flux, a back and forth movement that is held stable in her tattoo inscribed body, an indication “that life would go forwards and backwards, but never stop” (26). Her body serves both as a canvas for the imprint and record of trauma inflicted by male violence and triumph by means of self-inscribed tattoos, the carefully connected lines and dots indicating her freedom to choose. This condition makes it possible to read this novella along two temporal and spatial trajectories: Abigail’s life as a psychologically unstable teen in Nigeria before her migration to London and her life

with her cousin's husband in London as a victim of human trafficking. The "then" of the novella's plot often refers to her life as a young teenager living with her father in Nigeria and the "now" represents how she makes sense of the Nigerian locale and time with her current experience as an object of sexual Othering and objectification in London. The "then" and "now" that converge and coalesce literally in her body also throw light on the dual and contradictory reading of infliction on her body. While one explanation of the bodily violence indicates the force of coercion and control, the other interpretation suggests the resistance and power derived from the same source that produces the means of manipulating and owning her body.

This trace of dual trajectory of subjection and subversion in Abigail's action is an instance of what Judith Butler has called "displays of ambivalence" (10). The ambivalence lies in what on surface appears like outright infliction of violence and sexual exploitation-and objectively it is, but at a deeper level becomes a moment or context for Abigail to undermine the Foucauldian bio-power of the oppressive male power. On a broader level, Abigail's sex abuse within a family household and by a family member cannot be isolated from the violence and exploitation associated with larger scale trafficking in the global sex trade. And we see more elaboration on the workings of global sex trade, including the local and global complexities and complicities as we consider the explosion of African women's involvement in the global sex trade.

African Women, Global Women: Sex-Trafficking in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street*

Comparatively, Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* shares thematic affinities with Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail*. In the two literary texts, the authors are engaged in narrating the experiences of African women as migrants to the West to serve

its thriving sex work economy, a material practice pegged on institutional and discursive practices that eroticize and exoticize foreign Others; a globalized economy dependent on the global circulation of women of color based on its emphasis on a peripheral to center movement. Surprisingly, critics have not paid close attention to the connection between Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street* and Abani's *Becoming Abigail* in terms of the racialization of migration, the globalization of African women in the global sex work and the African female migrant complex experience of disavowal and empowerment in their relocation to the West.

Globalization is widely celebrated as a major player in the intensification of the contemporary migration of people, especially from the Global South to the North. As Stephen Castles and Sean Loughna observe, "migration is the crucial signifier of globalization" ("Globalization, Migration and Asylum" 177). The current transnational migration from Africa to the West in particular also comes with promises of political liberation, economic prosperity and advanced form of living. I consolidate my argument in this chapter that the freedom and empowerment implied in migration to the West is often an illusion and to a certain extent represents a new form of exploitation and devaluation of African women; this new wave of relocation of African women to the West for epicurean and economic intent constitutes an incontrovertible nexus of neocolonization and globalization.

In *On Black Sisters Street*, Unigwe's female protagonists, Sisi, Ama, Efe and Joyce showcase the complexity of global trafficking in women as sex-object to gratify the sexual cravings of a target slice of the Western male and illustrate as well the collusion of some Africans themselves in the new enslavement and exploitation of African women, an

echo of what obtained during the European colonization of Africa in which the patriarchal hegemony was complicit in the capture and trading of African men and women to the New World. In tandem with the exploitation of African women in the West and by the West, this chapter in addition explores some side effects of the neoliberal global economy on the African societies due to the global dispersion of her women to the West, in particular to Europe, to satiate the yearnings of its men for the exotic and fetishized African female body. In other words, this chapter adds to the contestation of the claim of processes of globalization as agents of progress in African society.

For many proponents of the promises and positive perspectives of globalization, references are easily made among others, to an enhanced flow of information and improved usage of technology between developed and developing nations and better transnational human interactions. John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge for instance, argue in their book in defense of globalization, *A Future Perfect: The Challenge and Hidden Promise of Globalization*, that globalization has yielded dividends like the “widening of what individual freedom might be” and empowerment through the increased availability of technology for communication and increased access to capital market (xxvi-xxviii). As a process, and aided and catapulted by advancement in communication and mobility across national boundaries, globalization “hidden promises” are fulfilled in people and nation-states that willingly embrace its unavoidable intrusion.

While it's true that globalization has enhanced the interaction of people, improved the exchange of ideas, capital and transnational mobility, it is also indisputable that it has engendered false dreams of economic and social advancement in many Africans, especially African women who become a rapidly increasing horde of sex labor migrants

trafficked to the West to seek fulfillment of these dreams. In addition to creating a false dream of economic empowerment and freedom, globalization is also dubious in not disclosing its adverse consequences in the degradation of humanity of African women as enabled by global migration to the West. In many regards, the world of the women protagonists of *On the Black Sister's Street* is more of a surreal than a real or substantive type. The novel tells a heart-wrenching story of four women labor migrants from African countries to Belgium, a country which also serves as the setting for Teju Cole's *Open City*- to realize dreams of economic prosperity the country purportedly offers. With the aid of a Nigerian stooge, Dele, these women are trafficked to Belgium to earn income as sex workers to support themselves and families. Sisi, a central character around whom others are pegged illustrates this world of false dream right from the novel's first page where in her inner-thoughts as she walks on an Antwerp street that will eventually lead to her violent death, she imagines herself to have undergone a social metamorphosis from a pathetic and poor life as a young girl in Lagos, Nigeria to a new life of freedom and economic prosperity in Antwerp, Belgium.

This change is indicated by her mental image of presently having her own Belgian lover, Luc, a house and "her own money-still new and fresh and the healthiest shade of green-" (3). This fantasy world as it were that Sisi inhabits is symbolized by the door-less house she shares with Luc- in turn, also a symbol of the exploitative European male; a house that, for all purposes appears to be a haven, but in reality, an encampment with no outlet. The house is undeniably linked to the house she shares with other women, Ama, Joyce and Efe, "the house on the Zwartzusterstraat" (4), the house managed by a nameless, well-educated and cold-hearted Nigerian woman simply addressed as "madam"

in the novel. This house not unlike Luc's house is a holding place under the scrutiny of Madam and Segun, her errand and handy man. Madam's house, these economic migrant women's new house symbolizes the new home that is Europe. In appearance, it is a place of happiness and hope for the women when compared to their home countries of origin where their hopes are easily crushed as they are conceived. All images of Nigerian home in the novel are negative, hence an exit by way of migration to Europe is uncritically welcomed. It is interesting to note that the escape to Europe by African women constitutes a form of return of creatures to the creator of the falsely bounded-together geographical contiguities called Africa. Migration of African women to the global cities of the North parallels and reflects Thomas Aquinas' theological principle of *exitus-reditus*, a human redemptive structure that explains how humans go out from God and return to Him.¹⁸ Like Aquinas' principle of emanation and return of humans to its creator, the migration of Africans to Europe can be understood as returning of European creation to its creation for redemption, a redemption not in a spiritual sense but material and psychological.

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas doctrinal formulation of the *exitus-reditus* (exit-return) structure of human and global history is derived from his Trinitarian notion of God: "Just as the processions of persons is the reason for the returns of creatures to their end; since, just as we have been created by the Son and the Holy Spirit, so too it is by them that we are united to our ultimate end" (*Summa Theologica*). This formulation of human coming and returning to its source seems to have a parallel in African chiasmus of migration- the return of Africans to the "creator" of African nations (Berlin Conference of 1884-85 where the "scramble for Africa" led to creation of modern day boundaries of African nation comes to mind).

Sisi sees no sign of the “prophecy” of prosperity envisioned for her by her parents coming to fulfillment in Lagos because “Lagos was a city of death, and she was escaping it” (85). Like her father “who could not earn enough to fulfil his dreams” and her mother whose “own dream of being a landlady” (78) fails to become a reality, Sisi sees signs of her own dream coming to nothing and turns somewhere else for its fulfillment. Sisi, whose real name in Nigeria is Chisom, considers herself to be lucky to live her dream in Belgium, as indicated in her self-reflexive inner-thoughts, “If I ‘d stayed back in Lagos, God knows where I’d have ended up” (15). For Sisi, Lagos was a place of lacking, a place of darkness and ignorance while Europe offers her the opportunity to acquire knowledge and enlightenment that is the key to realizing her dream, as she imagines on her arrival, Europe will teach to “spot the real gold” (90). As Sisi draw up memories of her failure in Lagos and compares to her new life and beginning in Belgium, the latter is seen as a place of elevation and sight. “Antwerp was where she would tease out those marbles, gather them and have them fulfill their promise. It was the place to be when dead dreams resurrected and soared and allowed you to catch them and live them” (91)

A failure to realize dreams of economic success and freedom in the home country is a major factor that binds these women together. In Dele, they find a means of migrating to Belgium to achieve their dreams. Aware of the women’s vulnerability because of failed political and economic dreams-a failure arguably connected to processes of neo-liberal global economic forces, Dele dangles an irresistible carrot of migration to Europe to realize the dream they find impossible to achieve in their home country. Dele represents the local facilitator of exploitation and devaluation of African

women. Working hand in hand with a Belgium-based Madam, they both aid the South North migration process vital to globalization.

Dele, nick-named “Senghor¹⁹,” sweet talks the economic and emotionally drained women into travelling abroad to work and make money to attain their dreams of economic freedom. He operates under the guise of an import and export company located on Randle Avenue, Lagos, “Dele and Sons Limited: Import-Export Specialist” (67). What “products” or “commodities” the company specializes in importing and exporting are not named, but obviously Dele deals in human trafficking, particularly trafficking of African women to Europe to work in the global sex industry. The labelling of human trafficking in economic transaction language suggest the dehumanization of the women, the objects of “Import-Export” business Dele and Sons Limited specializes in. Also, the name of the corporate business identifies a male or patriarchal purchase in the dehumanization of African women.

Dele’s marketing and deceptive skills in beguiling vulnerable, even if indiscreetly complying African women, into sex work in Europe is perhaps best illustrated in the way she convinces Efe to leave Nigeria for Belgium. Efe, a young single mother trying to give the best care to her son, L.I, the fruit of a long-term tryst with Lucky, a married businessman who takes advantage of her young age and gullibility. Dele creates an unreal spatial configuration of Europe and paints a picture of mobility that is without stress. He

¹⁹ It is unclear why Dele is nick-named “Senghor”, perhaps after the famous leader of the Negritude movement, Leopold Sedar Senghor, a poet and politician who served as the first president of Senegal from 1960-80.

makes them a proposal of taking them abroad: “Belgium. A country wey dey Europe. Next door to London. He made it sound as if you could walk from Belgium to London. From one door to the next” (70). Efe, like Dele’s other women clients fall for the charming idea of living with other Nigerian women and the added assurance that she will earn money to pay up her debt over a set period of time. This puts to rest any anxiety or fear being defrauded by Dele. The manner of carrying out his business transaction is similar to the way global financial institutions like IMF and World Bank ropes in developing nations into taking loans whose payment leads to more fiscal burden and loss of political will. As Joseph E. Stiglitz explains, “Because they so often result in a struggle for repayment, international loans become the portal through which a developing country encounters the power of the IMF and other global institutions” (*Making Globalization Work* 212). Dele assures the women of a way out of their poverty, he offers a bail out that whose repayment will come at a heavy cost, reflecting an imbalance that exist in the exchanges between global financial institutes and the African economies they offer bail outs.

Efe’s response to Dele’s offer betrays her unfiltered and idyllic notion of the West: “If I wan’ go abroad, Oga Dele? Anybody dey ask pikin if de pikin wan’ sweet?”(70). In other words, it is almost a stupid of Dele to ask her if she wants to emigrate to Belgium when to any African of her social class migration to any European or North American country is considered a relocation to a place of dream-fulfillment, an imaginary land of economic opportunities, what Noel B. Salazar calls in a Tanzanian parlance, a *majuu*- a place “up on top.” In the social imaginary of many economically struggling Africans, the West is paradise: “The cosmopolitan West is a dream, an act of

imagination and an aspiration. For its, imaginative features it is not only socially and economically appealing, but also fascinating because it points to a utopia, to a product of fantasy” (Salazar 678). The narrator adds a confirming comment: “Who did not want to go abroad? People were born with the ambition, and people died trying to fulfill that ambition” (70)-indeed, Sisi dies in the process of fulfilling her ambition of freedom and prosperity in Europe. Dele sells the idea of working abroad to her and the terms as well before mentioning the type of job and Efe in her childish thinking thinks of jobs in terms of home keeping or child care giver until Dele shocks her by saying “No. Sales” (71). Then by his lurid view of her he lets her know she will be selling her body sexually for money and by her acceptance of his business terms will be seen as “Dele and Son’s Limited export” (71).

The women are objects of sales in the global sex sales market with central location in Belgium, where Brussels, the capital of the European Union headquarters is located. They are valued for the pleasure to be derived from their body, sexual pleasure marketed to Belgian men whose high demands for exotic black women is hinted at when Efe gives Rita her younger sister feedback of her discussion with Dele. He reports to Rita that Dele has offered her a job in Belgium, “he says a woman can earn easy money there. They like black women there” (72). Dele assures Efe she will make easy money because he is assured of high sales because some of the Belgian customers embrace stereotype, racist and derogatory notions of African women’s sexual practice, which they are willing to pay for, hence the establishment of import-export companies involved in human trafficking like Dele’s type to supply enough to meet up their excess demands. The economic purveyance of “sales” of women for sex with White Belgian men here links

with a racist view of African women, their global dispersion into the global sex trade sells on the basis of their unique racial attributes, a stereotype of Black African women expertise in sexual acts.

As a matter of fact, the global sex market induced and sustained by sexual needs of Belgian men for African women is connected to the recent surge in population of women migrants to Europe, a very vital index to the globalization process. The relative ease with which Dele gets the women across the Nigerian border into Belgium also speaks to the weakening of national borders in the age of globalization-poorly monitored borders and exchange of bribes between human cargo merchants and foreign border security officials makes this illegal border crossings easy. It is logical to argue for the complicity of state officials on both sides of the borders in the illegal trafficking of women for sex work in Belgium. In Noelle Knox' *USA Today* piece, "In Belgium, Brothels are Big Business," Jean-Marie Dedecker, a member of Belgian Parliament, an official government documents reports that "80, 000 people visit prostitutes in Belgium each day." It is also stated that two-third of over 10, 000 prostitutes involved in the sex sales industry in Belgium are brought in illegally and Nigerian prostitutes make up a high percentage of this: "Three thousand women came into Belgium from Nigeria alone in the past five or six years, says Dedecker, who also sits on the government's commission on human trafficking. 'The Nigerian embassy helps to falsify their passports. After petrol, the biggest export of Nigeria is people'" (Knox).

The claim that "after petrol, the biggest export of Nigeria is people" is not supported by facts and is a false allegation. Exporting women to Europe for sex work will not appear on Nigerian export income as second to crude oil exportation. Also, the

allegation by the Belgian official that Nigerian embassy is involved in the fraudulent means of bringing women into Belgium for sex work is not substantiated, but may not be a false claim but that does not exclude Belgian authorities from wrong doing as well. The African sex workers in the novel complained about the greed of the Belgian police when it comes to paying them off to look away from the clear evidence of violation of the law against illegal immigrants and trafficking of women for sex. One of the female protagonists even alludes to situations when members of the police force demand sexual relations with the sex workers in lieu of skipping possible arrests and litigation.

But the women are willing to comply with the excess and unlawful demands of Belgian police as well as Belgian society. As Sisi argues, “I shall part my legs to this country, and it, in return, will welcome me and begin to unlock its secret to me” (90). Essentially, Sisi and others are willing to trade their female body with all the pleasure it offers for the opportunities that Belgium offers them in return-it is a trade by barter, a give and take situation. But ultimately, at least in Sisi’s case, migration to Belgium to trade in sex business did not bring the expected success and freedom. As Ama rightly says, home offers them no choices; as a result, coming to sell sex for money in the red-light district of Antwerp and Brussels offers them opportunities for happiness. However, this happiness and success remains mainly an illusion. Joyce challenges Ama’s view that they find happiness in Belgium that home country does not offer: “Are we really happy?” (99), Joyce questions Ama. Efe’s view reflects how what they see as happiness as mere illusion: “Sometimes I think my life is like a set of false teeth. The world sees what you show it: clean teeth wey white like Colgate. But you know for inside dat your real teeth

don rot finish!” (99). This statement simple means that appearance is not the same as reality.

In other words, the life in Belgium, despite the money made from sex business, is far from a quality life they actually dream of realizing in the country. They live under threat and exploitation of Dele and Madam who is in possession of their passport and shows no compassion when one of them died a mysterious death. The country itself appears to be full of bright light, but it is filled with darkness of violence and racism. The women refer to the news on TV about the violent death of a Malian nanny and deaths on the street from the machine gun of a eighteen year old Belgian. The sense of threat to their life in Belgium is even likened to gun violence in America. Sisi expresses a concern that “Antwerp is becoming like America, with all these shootings” (96).

Indeed, the women either had no choice or actually made a choice to migrate to Belgium to sell sex for money. Ama suggests this to Joyce when they debate after Sisi’s tragic death on whether they have found the happiness they came to Belgium to find. Despite the apparent failure to realize her true dream and potential threat to her life, Ama is happy with the choice made to migrate to Belgium. While Sisi and Joyce condemn Dele for their sad condition when it dawned on them that the dream they came to Belgium for is not being achieved, Ama considers Dele a helper: “Oga Dele just wanted to help” (98), she contends. Ama takes up responsibility for her choice and fate in Belgium and she makes this clear to Joyce, who appears to throw blame at the agent of globalization who got them where they presently are: “You know what, Joyce? I made this choice. At least I was asked to choose. I came here with my eyes wide open” (99).

African Sex Workers: Captives or Captors?

Chika Unigwe appears to offer varieties of view on the impact of sex trafficking on African women through the female protagonists in *On Black Sisters Street*. The characters are complex by virtue of their defiance and agency in the face of the ugly life as sex workers in often lonely and treacherous Belgium life. They are not to be narrowly seen as victims of exploitative men and women like Dele and Madam respectively, or the sexual gluttony and racism of the Belgian people, rather, they are strong women who dared to see their dreams of economic empowerment realized.

In Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street*, readers encounter Sisi, Ama, Efe and Joyce, African female labor migrants to Belgium. These four fictional characters practically holed up in the red-light district of Antwerp by an unnamed female overseer, commonly referred to as madam, are victims of a global sex labor industry powered mainly by a section of European male's insatiable desires for fetishized African female body. In this context, commoditization of pleasure, that is, the chain of "production" and "marketing" of African women for the primary purpose of satisfying the exotic and libidinal overflow of some European men is at the same time a means of satisfying material lust created and facilitated by the process of economic globalization. In essence, the objectification of the African woman runs simultaneously with the transnational mobility of people, an integral part of globalization process.

The global circulation and consumption of the African female body in the context of the global sex industry, I argue, are aligned to the subjectivation of African women and obliterating forces of globalization. My argument also by extension stresses the complicity of Africans themselves, operating as agents of globalization in the

“thingification” and insertion of the African woman into the self-annihilating practice of the global sex industry. The interpretation of Chika Unigwe’s text I present here is premised on my embrace of Foucault’s notion of subjectivation. In my understanding of Foucault’s insight on the concept of subjectivation and as expounded in the thoughts and works of Deleuze and Guattari, I surmise that it refers to the fabrication or production of the subject position. Foucault’s long and convoluted engagement with the notion of subject has invited diverse understanding and notions of subjectivation by scholars. Foucault is at least concerned with the constitution of subject as an object for itself and not a fabrication of the external other for itself. Foucault describes subjectivation as “the process whereby one obtains the constitution of a subject, more precisely of a subjectivity” (qtd in Johnny Gratton, “Introduction: The Return of the Subject” 10). In other words, the external creation of the Other as a subject, the objectification of individual through the external manufacture of her image as in the case of black African women. They occupy a subject position of exotic, pleasure granting machine for the European male. The African women in turn imbibe and embrace this identity and proceed to use the created image for monetary gains and economic freedom.

Unigwe explores and complicates the false dream and promises of globalization in *On the Black Street Sisters*. In this fictional instance, globalization is calibrated to the socio-economic needs of vulnerable African women, inspiring a utopian dream of individual freedom and economic prosperity by means of transnational relocation. A consumer culture inspired and nurtured by neo-liberal global capitalism creates political and economic conditions that necessitate emigration of African women to Europe for the purpose of offering sexual gratification primarily to European men in exchange for

money with an end goal of gaining an illusory freedom and economic prosperity. Consequently, the economic concept of demand and supply offers a paradigm for a literary analysis of African women's involvement in the global sex industry as represented in this contemporary African novel.

In other words, the life in Belgium, despite the money made from sex business, is far from a quality life they dream of realizing in the country. They live under threat and exploitation of Dele and Madam who is in possession of their passport and showed no compassion when one of them died a mysterious death. The country itself appears to be full of bright light, but it is filled with darkness of violence and racism. The women refer to the news on TV about the violent death of a Malian nanny and deaths on the street from the machine gun of a eighteen year old Belgian. The sense of threat to their life in Belgium is even likened to gun violence in America. Sisi expresses a concern that "Antwerp is becoming like America, with all these shootings" (96).

Indeed, the women either had no choice or actually made a choice to migrate to Belgium to sell sex for money. Ama suggests this to Joyce when they debate after Sisi's tragic death on whether they have found the happiness they came to Belgium to find. Despite the apparent failure to realize her true dream and potential threat to her life, Ama is happy with the choice made to migrate to Belgium

My claim in this chapter is that the African women relocated to Belgium to work in the sex industry are induced into a subject position where a perception of economic empowerment is ultimately a devaluation of the dignity and the notion of freedom is enslavement. The writer creates female characters with the agency and will to make life saving choices, but I argue that these are undermined by the indubitable fragmentation of

their human dignity. For instance, Ama takes up responsibility for her choice and fate in Belgium and she makes this clear to Joyce, who appears to throw blame at the agent of globalization who got them into their present predicament: “You know what, Joyce? I made this choice. At least I was asked to choose. I came here with my eyes wide open” (99). She made the choice but the choice itself is not free of internalization of dubious notion of the West, of Belgium as a paradise of dream, an alternative and contrast to her home country, a place of social and economic inhibition. She like others makes a choice under duress of a contingent perception of her African home country that is contiguous to the nation’s calibration to the sex market supplying the excess sex demand of Europe, a condition induced by neo-liberal economic forces of globalization.

At the risk of interpreting Foucault out of context, I contend that his reflection on space, knowledge and power speaks to the connection I see between false dreams of economic freedom and the migration of African women to Belgium to supply the excess demands of her sex industry. In his thought on practice of freedom published in *The Foucault Reader*, Foucault speaks of the connection between freedom, relations and spatial distributions: “I think it is somewhat arbitrary to try to dissociate effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand” (246).

I think Foucault is right to insist on these connections. As applied to the context of sex trafficking of African women, there is the connection between the promise of economic freedom, the demeaning subject position of African sex workers’ relation to their Belgian clients (or customers?) and the dispersion of these women from Africa to

the red-light districts of Belgium. We understand the false freedom attributed to these African women in relation to their subjectivation and the deceitful dream created for them by migration to Europe. Efe captures the illusion of migration to Belgium as *sine qua non* of freedom and happiness in the following words: “Sometimes I think my life is like a set of false teeth. The world sees what you show it: clean teeth wey white like Colgate. But you know for inside dat your real teeth don rot finish!” (99). As we shall see in chapter 2, the dream of migration takes on a contrasting character in Adichie’s novel, *Americanah*.

CHAPTER 2: GLOBALIZATION AND RACE DISCOURSE IN ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH*

“Obama will end racism in this country” (*Americanah* 292)

Blackness in Global America

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), the 2013 winner of the National Book Critics Circle award for Fiction and the 2017 winner for the “One Book, One New York” program, the narrator explores the life of Ifemelu, a Nigerian immigrant studying in the United States. Like Julius, the Nigerian immigrant in Teju Cole's *Open City* that I will examine for his faith in cosmopolitanism in chapter 3, Ifemelu too is a Nigerian immigrant studying in the US but unlike Julius, more conscious of American racial structures and confronts the constraints it places on the realization of global citizenship aspirations. As an immigrant, she encounters for the first time the weight of race and racism in her encounter with Americans and non-Americans alike. Like her Nigerian lover, Obinze, who faces difficulty as an undocumented migrant in London, Ifemelu's identity as an African becomes a space for Adichie to examine and complicate the ongoing discourse on blackness and racial identity in America.

In *Americanah*, race and identity discourse and by extension, critical race theory take on a fresh and intriguing tone and turn that interrogate the post-racial claim of America's global culture. The protagonist Ifemelu, a Nigerian immigrant to the United States, scrutinizes multiple dimensions of black racial problems in her race blog named

Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as *Negroes*) and clearly marks the distinct experiences of blackness between “American Blacks” and “Non-American Blacks.” Ifemelu’s interrogation of American racial culture through her blogs and engagement with social reality opens a possibility for challenging the implicit promise of post-prejudicial world due to the influence of globalization.

Contemporary Globalization and Racism

Contemporary globalization thrives on the assumption that due to the intensification of human interactions and mingling across the globe, aided by migration and mass media, the pull and cultural purchase of ethnic identities and exclusive national belongings have been greatly erased, or at least rendered incapable of instilling notions of blind nationalism or consideration of racial hierarchy in relations among citizens of nation-states. Speaking in this vein, Stuart Hall, in “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity” argues that racial identities are no longer seen in a stable or fixed form as the new global culture continues to erode old ideas of essentialist racial constructions responsible for the institution of racial and ethnic hierarchies (175,177). An aspect of celebrated contemporary global process highlighted in the Twenty-First Century African fiction is transnational or interracial encounters across the Atlantic. Internet, media, and intensified migrations and other indexes of globalization have strongly influenced how Africans encounter others, and they play a key role in the Twenty-First century African writing.

In view and in contrast to the seemingly stance of post-racial ideologues, my reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013) in this chapter indicates

that any narrative of our local or global “social imaginary,” to borrow Benedict Anderson’s term²⁰ cannot be evacuated of an enduring problem of racial hierarchy and stratification and the discriminations that follow in their wake. The ubiquitous presence of race and racism in the Black American identity discourse, I argue, is explored from multiple angles and complexities in Adichie’s fiction. Can we confidently argue that the American society of the post - Obama era is a post-racial one? Do we now have a *colorblind America* because of the progress made since the post-civil rights era? Is the black experience of racism now so minimal and marginal that we can stop focusing on race? If race issues still matter, as some others argue, what are new and more insightful ways of engaging with the issue for a more fruitful and complex discourse? These are some of the questions among others engaged by the novel and I argue here that the novel offers responses to these questions and in addition provides what would strike readers as a fresh illuminative point of observation and commentary on race and racism in America, from the vantage point of a black African immigrant. However, the intriguing and celebrated observations and speculations made on race by Ifemelu, the novel’s non-American black protagonist, come with a caveat; they are not projected as solutions to the problem of racism. Despite this critical caution, the novel, building on and extending Black American race narratives presents vistas of race from the point of view of a Nigerian immigrant, especially on how race affects the day to day living of American

²⁰ See Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin Spread of Nationalism* (London, Verso, 1983).

blacks and non-American blacks alike, which invites an analysis; an analysis that ultimately exposes the ruse in the claim by some commentators in both scholarly , journalistic and popular public spheres that in the contemporary global era, America is now a post-racial society.

Here, I engage Adichie's fiction from the context of contemporary globalization as an agent for erasure of racism and consequently a basis for making a claim for a postracial/racist global community. With a focus on American and British locations, Adichie's immigrant characters expose the failure of globalization in the face of enduring racism that is multiple and complex in dimension. Globalization tends to present a façade of the West as a thriving place for racial diversity and equality with the landmark election of Barack Obama as the president of the United States as a marker for a progress made in racial relations. Adichie's novel, *Americanah*, interrogates and upsets this ruse of a postracial world.

Black America Narrative Tradition and the Ruse of Post-Racial Society

Engagement with racial discourse in American published novels has never been a rarity, but it has frequently been couched in a garb of discomfort that tends to attenuate possibilities of a more elaborate, extensive and productive conversation on the controversial issue. Writings on racial problems in America have roots in thematic focus on race and slavery found in slave narrative traditions of the 19th century. The realism of autobiographical slave narratives, however takes on a fresh and more incisive dimension in the novel form. The American depiction of the black experience of race and racism in novels operates in tandem with views on race in literary and critical theory.

Consequently, from exemplar American novels like Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to Morrison's *Paradise*, either in a subtle or overt form, a thematic reference to race and racism carved a niche at the epicenter of narratives on American society; and despite the discomfort and controversy that fraught the subject, it remains a perennial feature of the novel genre.

Adichie's American published novel *Americanah* continues the focus on a central subject of American novel, especially black American novels, the problem of racial identity and racism. In her own case, she hits the target more directly, touching on multiple aspects of racial stratification and divide, viewing it from the perspective of a

Nigerian immigrant; Adichie's approach is more overt and straightforward. As Stefanie Reuter argues, Adichie pushes the boundary in not "sticking to stylistic rules" that guide novels about race, which in Adichie's words "should be lyrical and poetic and never quite definite" ("Becoming a Subject" 5).²¹ Adichie's stylistic approach opens window to debate the proposition that American society of the global period is a post-racial one.

The purported shift in social imagination on Black American racial identity discourse emerged in the aftermath of the election of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States. A change from a society scarred by a gloomy history of racial

²¹ For Adichie's thoughts on writing a different type of novel on race, see Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chitra Ramaswamy, "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on writing about race." Interview by Chitra Ramaswamy. *Scotsman*, 27th April, 2013. www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/culture/books/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-onwriting-about-race-1-2911386. Accessed 26 September, 2017.

discriminatory practices against minority and people of African descent to a putative post-racial America is signified particularly in the election of the first bi-racial Black American into the oval office. This emergent narrative of Black progress and attending claim to a post-racial America has precursor in the period preceding the election of the first black president. Considering apparent advances made by blacks in different fields of endeavor, some social intellectuals like the black social theorist Charles Johnson would describe as “antique” and “ahistorical” any contemporary literary rehash of “the old Black American narrative of pervasive discrimination” (5) in the face of social transformations taking place in the 21st century globalized America. In the contemporary, Johnson argues that “It simply is no longer the case that the essence of black American life is racial victimization and disenfranchisement, a curse and a condemnation, a destiny based on color in which the meaning of one’s life is thinghood, created even before one is born.” (“The End of the Black American Narrative” 5) The bane of a struggling Black America is a problem of “inequities of class” which crosses across all races, not a race problem, Johnson maintains. There is a dimension to Johnson’s argument about postracial America that intersects similar claim about post-Blackness claim by similar middle-class American blacks like the writer and social critic Toure.

In his provocative book on racial identity in America, *Who’s Afraid of PostBlackness? What it Means to Be Black Now*, Toure argues on a similar platform like Johnson concerning the fluid nature of black racial identity. Concerning being Black in contemporary America Toure argues against the limitation of identity police who determines what Blacks do and don’t do by proposing that being rooted in blackness does not mean being restricted by it, in other words, post-blackness means that in the era of

integration and multiculturalism an individualized notion of blackness has emerged that avoids the narrowness of the past and embraces the freedom of the present to broaden and diversify the concept of blackness, “Because the beautiful diversity of Blackness is the most remarkable feature of a Blackness that we continue to try to quarantine” (5). The notion of Blackness that Toure advocates is an ideal one, a beautiful ideal supported by restriction breaking notion of globalization and cosmopolitanism and according to him, it is in no way “a disavowal of history” (22). The problem with this type of post-Blackness is that it reflects the experience of some middle-class and professional blacks, not the experience of the clear majority. The life experience of blacks in America is determined by the system that is still in place, a system that does not give room to them to broaden their blackness as is the case with Toure, without some self-inflicting pains. A living example of the sort of the individualized form of post-Blackness that Toure advocates perhaps would be the Supreme Court judge, Clarence Thomas “whose ultraconservative-some would say self-hating- policies and positions have forced many Blacks to confront the reasons why we feel a certain connection to certain Blacks and not to others, and how that connection goes deeper than skin color because Blackness is about far more than color” (47). The premise of post-Blackness theory can possibly be discerned from the theory of globalization, the coming to being of a more integral and connected society that consists of diverse races and cultures but what Toure’s theory of post-Blackness fails to account for is the still-existing systemic racism that is not colorblind, a deep sense and belief in certain places and in certain people-the right wing white supremacist movement led by Richard Spencer for instance, of the superiority of the one race over another. With all these still in place, the cosmopolitan ideal of post-Blackness will not fly. The

exemplar of such individualized notion of Blackness like Clarence Thomas would continue to be seen by clear majority of black people as member of Uncle Tom's club.

Johnson and other advocates of a post-racial America ideology, of a color-blind society, and consequently of an uncomplicated black identity are not paying due attention to the day to day experience of non-middle-class Black majority who cannot easily be dissuaded from believing in the "restrictive" notion of black identity and ongoing existence of racism in a diverse and global America. Johnson, Toure and to some extent, Thomas Clarence's appeal to post-blackness and post-racial America appears to suggest

Du Bois' famous words in *The Souls of Black Folk* that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line" (5) is now obsolete in the light of presumed progressive social changes made in the contemporary milieu of American racial politics. In this understanding therefore, Black America has greatly overcome most of her race rooted problems and the current wave of thinking globally and cosmopolitan dividends has shorn away the previously prevalent and shrinking force of racism of the past. The new imagination is that, after all, the relationship between race and globalization has denuded the impact of racism and thinking along the line of shades of skin color-hence, we can legitimately make a claim for a post-racial America and experience. Johnson calls for a novel approach to Black American narrative that considers the progress made by blacks and the less or negligible influence race and racism now have on the progress or recognition of black identity.

Adichie's *Americanah* engages with Johnson's critique of contemporary black novels by confronting the notion of an American society that has made progress on race and where influence of race and racism on black life has been greatly denuded. A pointer

to an assumption of the emergence of post-racial society in the novel is identifiable in a conversation that takes place in the heat of the election of Obama as the first African American president. “Obama will end racism in this country” (*Americanah* 292), says a balding white man, the baldness, perhaps a somatic index symbolizing a bare and absurd declaration that Obama’s ascendance to the White House will put an end to an endemic social scourge of racism in America. This declarative statement spiced with a great dose of confidence is affirmed and boosted by an unnamed Haitian lady with big Afro hair, a symbolic reference to the vitality of a presumptive positive and robust notion of an already existing post-racial American society, when the anonymous character adds that in her romantic relationship with her white boyfriend, “race was never an issue for them” (292). These allusions to a strain of opinion being purveyed by some scholars in the mainstream of race/racism conversation, a view in favor of a putative transcendence of racial matters, are embedded in the thoughts and comments of the anonymous white man and the Haitian woman.

The assumption that racism is transcended in the aftermath of the election of Obama, and in a racially diverse and cosmopolitan American nation-state is however challenged in the novel. The novel reveals the enduring reality of racial inequality and how its rootedness in the legacy of systemic racism is often avoided in public discourse because it is an uncomfortable one to tackle. When it is raised in public discourse as Ifemelu says over and over in *Americanah*, it is either done in a way that it minimizes its general negative impact or as in the case of Obama during his presidential election campaign, it is done in a politically correct manner. For Ifemelu, she speaks boldly and courageously to the subject partly because she does so from an outsider position, being an

immigrant, a Non-American black, the term she uses to describe blacks in America not of American origin. In other words, she has the benefit of not being already formed in an ideological position on the subject because she comes from a place where race was not an issue: “I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America” (292). This declaration on color-based discrimination subtly questions the veracity of America as a cosmopolitan global space, a transcultural place of diversity and multiculturalism supported by the contemporary process of globalization.

To revisit once again one of the most influential statements on race theory, we recall that in 1903, Du Bois writes that “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line-the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Africa and Asia, in America and the islands of the sea” (*The Souls of Black Folks* 19). Placing in the background the controversy that Du Bois’ statement generated and is still generating in contemporary critical race theory discourse, I argue in this chapter that even now in the twenty-first century American global society, racially based discursive practices still construct identity and social relations; distinctions and demarcations in social relations rooted in race are still an observable problem, and “the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men” (19) across continents still confronts us in the era of globalization. Despite judicial progress made to pull down the barriers of racial discriminations, racism is still a palpable experience of black and colored America. As Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom argue in *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible*, despite progress made so far, the American race problem is not solved, “America remains a very color-conscious society, and a true racial equality is a dream” (10). I argue therefore that

the pronouncement that we now live in a more diverse and tolerant society and consequently in a putative “color-blind” and “post racial” society is a sketchy flight and limps on landing. The advent of the era of globalization has not diminished the narrow, essentialist and myopic racist way of constructing identity and social interactions. Again, I am aware that globalization has brought the world nearer together and concur with Andrew L Barlow that “Globalization has produced growing numbers of cosmopolitan people who are truly multicultural, who live every day crossing boundaries” (1), yet, and paradoxically, race and racism still mark and inform how people in the global cities of the global North live day to day.

Written in the third-person omniscient narrative voice, there are many textual moments in Adichie’s seven-part novel that illustrate an interesting and engaging insight into the black experience of racism as observed by a non-American black. When Ifemelu arrives in America, she observes and experiences for herself the problem of racial hierarchy and divide that are often tangled with other social practices like romantic relationships and identity formation. My subsequent analyses of *Americanah* will highlight and complicate the notion held in some quarters that keeping the conversation on race alive in the contemporary American society is to take the society backwards into a regression, so to say, from the progress made over decades of race relations discourse, marked especially by the election of Obama as the first African American president.

Here, my analysis of Adichie’s *Americanah* is a response to George Yancy’s invitation in *On Race: 334 Conversations in a Time of Crisis*, “an invitation, an entreaty to join in this dangerous conversation as we experience, globally, the fierce urgency of now” (10). Consequently, I will argue in this chapter that Ifemelu’s experience of racism

and discourse on the “fraught and thorny” topic of race via her blog is an indication that the old black American narrative of racial discrimination is not yet outlived in the current global America, it is not yet a post-racial American society even in the era of cultural globalization. This chapter, therefore, exposes the claim to a post-racial Western society in an era of globalization for what it is, a political and cultural ruse. We also examine here assumptions held about the American society and generally of the West by non-American blacks, an impression of a tolerant, multicultural and global society that offers opportunities and realization of the appealing American dream to migrants from other parts of the world. That is the image of America media projects to the African consumers of her films and books, a condition hastened by globalization.

American Dream: Non-American Blacks Perception of the West

Ifemelu and her boyfriend Obinze, as young adults growing up in an intellectually inquisitive environment in Nigeria are nourished on a glowing and attractive image of an America blind to the complexity of race and racism that underlie its social construction. Oblivious of perspective and experience of American life and values like J.P. Clark’s critique of American capitalism and Black American lives in his 1964 autobiography, *America, Their America*²², there is preponderance of perceptions among young Nigerians of an exaggerated view of America as a paradise for black Americans. For many Nigerian

²² Readers interested in an unusually critical view of American middle-class, ways of life and black-American value would find a valuable source in J.P. Clark. 1964. *America, Their America*. Heinemann, 1968.

youths in the novel, the rosy view of America is what is derived from films, TV and social media that in recent time has imploded Nigerian socio-cultural existence through an increased and easier access made possible by the process of globalization.

Though Obinze is well acquainted with American novels like Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and eagerly recommends it to Ifemelu, he is oblivious of the way the novel has been read by some critics as racist mainly because of its stylistic reiteration of black stereotypes, to appeal emotionally to its direct audience, white readers. Like most of his contemporaries in Nigeria, Obinze is well informed about the American popular culture that portrays a picture of black American life as a beautiful and enviable one. He flaunts not only his up-to-date knowledge of popular sit-coms like *The Cosby Show* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, he considers it a compliment as well in telling Ifemelu that she looks "like a black American" (67), as if there is a fixed and single black American look, the type of notion that Toure tries to do away with in his theory of post-Blackness. Obviously, Obinze's vision of American society as a paradise for blacks eclipses the pervading racism that maps the relationship between blacks and whites, and of course, between blacks and blacks. But unknown to Obinze and his likes who live far away from the true reality, the factual reality of black life and experience in America is a complex one and not the simple utopian imaginary they conceive of it. The reality of black life is very disconcerting to average American whites and blacks as well and hardly is there a tangible penetrating and positive public conversation on the pariah subject; what we usually get is an emotional and divisive political vitriolic on racism.

As it is with young Nigerians, so it is with their parents, who tend to glorify America in terms of its promises for aspiring Nigerians who are encouraged to migrate

there. America offers opportunities that are not available at home. Just as in Abani's *Becoming Abigail* that we encountered in chapter one where we met Abigail's father who believed that relocation of his daughter to London would guarantee success, so also does Ifemelu's father affirm the notion of America as a land of opportunities without awareness of other components like the racism that blacks still experience. He so much affirms his positive view of America by not only letting his daughter realize her opportunity of making home there but wishing Nigeria would replicate the society: "I have no doubt that you will excel," he says in reference to Ifemelu's job opportunity "America creates opportunities for people to thrive. Nigeria can indeed learn a lot from them" (207). With home country in economic and social decline, America is the place to escape to, a place to achieve dreams unrealizable in Nigeria. Even Obinze's highly principled university professor mother eventually caves in to the America lure by encouraging her bored son to travel to America by way of London. She gets her visa to London to see what he can do with his life and says to Obinze: "Maybe you can get to America from there. I know that your mind is no longer here" (236). It is understandable that she shares in the frustration of her son having to stay at home for months due to university campus' closure consequent upon university lecturers' strike. It was in the late 80s during General Abacha's military regime in Nigeria and there were a lot of clashes between the military dictatorship and the intelligentsia. The military regime treats the universities and other higher institutions of learning with contempt-by refusing to offer financial support for their teaching and research goals, and expects them to follow its dictatorial whims and caprices, expecting us "to behave as if we are sheep" (64) as Ginika's father, a university lecturer says. The decision of the academy to stand their

ground in the form of organized strikes and insistence on the payment of unpaid salaries results in reprisal action by the military by ordering indefinite closure of university campuses.

This has repercussion on the academic programs of university students. Like the case of the tough living condition that encouraged young Nigerians to seek relocation to Europe as we observed in Abani's *Becoming Abigail* and Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street*, the condition of living gets tough and coupled with the tightening of economic spending on education as recommended by global financial institutions like World Bank and IMF, many Nigerians in Adichie's *Americanah* crave and desire to migrate to Europe and America. It becomes common for parents to send their children abroad to complete their university programs as is the case with Ginika, Obinze and Ifemelu's classmate, when he announces to them that her father decided that she is going to America to study: "My popsie said we are going to America" (64). For Ifemelu and Obinze however, going to America is their choice, their dream. The lure of America only becomes more inviting with the long-term university lecturers strike. With the encouragement from her aunt Uju, a medical doctor seeking to get into residence program in the US and Ginika who just finished college in the US, Ifemelu sits for the SAT exam to procure the means to her own "American ambitions" (100). Also, Obinze, like most of his middle-class Nigerian peers with plans "to get a postgraduate degree in America, to work in America, to live in America" soon finds justification to join the bandwagon of those itching to "check out" of Nigeria in order to set foot in the Western world full of opportunities.

In Obinze's case, the desire "to go abroad" is inspired earlier in his childhood by a well-known late 1980s TV jingle aimed at discouraging Nigerians who seek to migrate to

the West due to poor socio-economic conditions. In the TV advertisement, a man complains about the difficult life in Nigeria and thereby justifies his reason for “checking out”: “The advertisement on NTA for Andrew Checking Out, which he had watched as a child, had given shape to his longings. ‘Men, I’m checkin’ out,’ the character Andrew had said, staring cockily at the camera. ‘No good roads, no light, no water. Men, you can’t even get a bottle of soft drink!’” (234). The events that precipitated waves of migration in the early 80s during the military rule of General Mohammed Buhari, in addition to poor living conditions-like limiting drinking of Fanta with permission, to one bottle on Sunday, in Obinze’s middle-class household are the violence and intimidation imposed on civilians whose demands for a better life are also alive in the late 90s during General Abacha’s regime. The tough times further nurture the longing in Obinze and others like him to migrate to America- “America became a place where bottles and bottles of Fanta were to be had, without permission” (235). But migration to Europe or America is one thing; being able to realize the promises it offers; the promises of neoliberal capitalism is another story. As Obinze’s experience indicates when he eventually arrives in London en route to America, the Western world is not always what it appears to be, what is distilled in images and reports obtained from TV, social media and literatures.

In London, Obinze finds his likes who migrate there to fulfil their longings for progress and prosperity, living a degraded life, living in fear of deportation and living under pretenses. In a conversation with Chidi and Nosa, Obinze learns that to thrive in UK, he must live a lie. For instance, he must take up a false identity to work legally.

Nicholas, his cousin, makes this clear to Obinze at the outset of his arrival in London: “the first thing to look for is not food or water, it is an NI number so you can work. Take all the jobs you can. Spend nothing. Marry an EU citizen and get your papers. Then your life can begin” (241). The reality of life in the West for many Africans who relocate there based on the opportunities it announces are often in dissonance to the actual experience there. At least for Obinze, the dream is now realized. Before he can get his status legitimized, his fraudulent path is exposed possibly by the same set of Africans who offered to help him.

In Ifemelu’s case, the experience is dotted with a lot of dark spots but eventually she makes an impact, she makes money from her blog and obtains a Green card. It could be that America is truly the place to achieve a bright future. Interestingly, Obinze is the one “besotted with America,” (70) the one who rates American novels over British novels not just for their better aesthetic qualities but also for the possible realities they portray: “I read American books because America is the future” (70). But again, what does that future include? He has no clue about what baggage American Blacks and Non-American Blacks carry with them into that future; a future likely to be marked with the problem of race relation that burdens the present time. As Ifemelu would discover after she gets to America, the image of black life in America that they have come to know via American television shows like *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* and *A Different World* and even new ones like *Friends* and *The Simpsons* about white Americans is not the life she experiences in real time. But then, she still aches for the imaginary life in America the television shows present for consumption- “lives full of bliss, where all problems had sparkling solutions in shampoos and cars and packaged foods, and in her mind they became real

America, the America she would only see when she moved to school in the Autumn” (114). It did not take time however for Ifemelu to discover the America that was not exported to Nigerian viewers, the images of America society equally embroiled in social crises she previously provincializes to Nigeria. Her excitement about America soon turns to anxiety from the moment she sees the America represented in “images of men being hauled off in handcuffs, distraught families in front of charred, smoldering houses, the wreckage of cars crashed in police chases, blurred videos of armed robberies in shops” (115). But her American experience is a complex one, although she fulfils her American dream of acquiring education and financial uplifts. However, any stable notion of America as a cosmopolitan paradise is sooner troubled when she experiences the problem of race and racism for the first time in her life.

An African Immigrant’s Dangerous Conversation on Racism: The Blogs

It is unarguable that Adichie’s experience of race conflicts in America informs the fictional character Ifemelu. Ifemelu like Adichie comes to America to attend college and during the period becomes aware of the reality of racism that she did not know about back in Nigeria. Ifemelu like her alter ego Adichie also attains success in writing. In her almost twenty years residence in America, Ifemelu attends an Ivory League college, writes lifestyle blogs, gets well paid giving public talks on race relations, and obtains a permanent resident permit to the bargain. These remarkable achievements speak well of global travel made more possible in the era of globalization. It is incontestable that the American dream turns out well for Ifemelu and would not have been so “if it hadn’t been for her American experiences” (Kirsch 63). However, her American experience is a

complex and complicated one. Based on her experiences and observations she writes a blog that reflect the unusual perspective of an African immigrant of the race issue in America.

Ifemelu's witty and terse "lifestyle blog" called *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those formerly Known as Negroes) by a NonAmerican Black*, is a race-relation focused platform where, as SapphicDerrida, a frequent visitor to the blog says, Ifemelu uses her "irreverent, hectoring, funny and thoughtprovoking voice to create a space for real conversations about an important subject" (5). The blog's name makes people uncomfortable, Ifemelu argues.

Conversation on race in all its configuration occupies Adichie to a considerable extent in the novel; race is tied to other themes of love, gender, class and migration. As Subashini Navaratnam contends, "In Americanah, Race-in-America is as much a character as much as Ifemelu and her first love, Obinze" ("Race-in-America is a Central Character in Americanah"); therefore, race issue in America is central.

However, race talk not only being a taboo topic that makes people uncomfortable is also sometimes considered by some as an overhyped topic. In one instance, an unnamed, dreadlocked white man Ifemelu meets on one of her train rides tells her that "Race is totally overhyped these days, black people need to get over themselves, it's all about class now, the haves and have not" (*Americanah* 4). In other words, the speaker and another white man from Ohio who objects to Ifemelu's race themed blog, saying that "The only race that matters is the human race" (4), try to avoid the unnerving discourse on race by shifting to other non-controversial, mild and generic topic to make sure conversation on race involving white people does not gain grounds.

This does not however mean that Adichie's *Ifemelu* had little or no interest in these other important topics, she also addresses them in her race blog because she understands how important they are. For instance, class inequality is an issue that black community should and as a matter of fact engages and responds to. But Adichie's novel addresses class problem in view of its interconnectedness gender and race. Her fictional characters, both American blacks and Non-American blacks are drawn from the middle class. These non-typical black characters, that is, unlike most characters of global novel who are struggling individuals due to poverty or war, characters who must either flee countries of origin or endure discrimination if they remain in the country of origin, Adichie's black characters experience as well prejudices based on color of their skin. There are indeed class issues involved in the problem of black people, but underpinning class inequality is the problem of racism. What Adichie has done successfully is to interweave the different and multiple layers of discussion on class, gender and race into a cohesive whole. The black middle class, often Adichie's preferred choice of class for her fictional engagement, is embroiled in the issue of race as well as the typical markers of class discourse. As Sarala Krishnamurthy points out, "The novel is remarkable in the way it encapsulates the multiple discourses that belong to the educated middle-class American society and its interactions with people of colour" ("Americanah"). The novel takes upon this class and race interactions even though my primary interest at this point is the disconnection between the avowed cosmopolitanism of the American middle class, black and white and the problem of race.

In a further discussing of race in America from the African immigrants' perspectives in the novel, perhaps some preliminary discussion to the primacy of race in

America would help. When Emenike, a Nigerian immigrant married to an English woman is asked by Alexa, a white British on race in America, the dialogue that follows throws light on an European perspective of American racism. Alexa asks Emenike, “How did you see race in America, by the way, Emenike? It’s an iniquitously racist country, isn’t it?” (276). The British thinks of themselves more cosmopolitan than Americans. But then the case of issue is brought up as playing major issue in race relation in Britain than in America. As Obinze puts it, “A white boy and a black girl who grow up in the same working-class town in this country can get together and race will be secondary, but in America, even if the white boy and black girl grow up in the same neighborhood, race would be primary” (277). Again, the intersection of race and class is highlighted here by Adichie but the primary attention is given to race.

An aspect of race discourse that is problematic that needs to be addressed at this point is the claim that the term race in the first place is an invention by the society. In other words, in a true sense, there is no race. This dismissal, as helpful as it may sound in focusing on shared common humanity of all people rather than the color of their skin or bodily features carries a danger of minimizing a major problem that minority face in America. Ifemelu addresses this problem with designation of race: “They tell us race is an invention, that there is more genetic variation between two black people than there is between a black person and a white person. Then they tell us black people have a worse kind of breast cancer and get more fibroids. And white folks get cystic fibrosis and osteoporosis. So what’s the deal, doctors in the house? Is race an invention or not?” (304). The deal is that genetics do not explain the reality that color of skin and false science of race has been used historically to justify the minimization of some people’s

humanity and intelligence by another group of privileged people. The root of this dismissal of existence in some quarters is the fear and anxiety from discussing the subject because it would eventually place them as the oppressors.

A significant aspect of discourse on race is the discomfort it creates when it comes up. This unsettling tinge to conversation on race take on a complicated turn when those engaged in the conversation are the liberal elites-whites and blacks as is the case at a dinner party in Manhattan to celebrate the election of Barack Obama as the Democratic Party's candidate for President of the United States. In the global cultural capital like Manhattan, and among elite and educated liberals, a discussion on state of racial relation, one would expect, should reveal progressive insight on racial discourse but that expectations are not necessarily met. In a comment that seeks to express appreciation on "How Far We Have Come" as a result of Obama's election, a Hatian woman opines that race issue no longer matter, especially in inter-racial relationships, to which Ifemelu responds that such position is only a wishful one and not a reality. It is wish that also exposes a lie. Ifemelu elaborates and places are objection in context by speaking to the reality of race from her own perspective as an immigrant:

I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America. When you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn't matter when you're alone together because its just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters. But we don't talk about it. We don't even tell our love partners the small things that piss us off and the things we wish they understood

better, because we're worried they will say we're overreacting, or we're too sensitive. (292-3)

For Ifemelu, being sensitive discussing race at nice liberal dinners is another way of raising and conversing on such a critical issue. If the white liberals who profess commitment to social justice and racial equality for people of color choose to evade discussion on the topic, then they choose to remain in darkness on the reality that many people still experience. Part of the justification for not carrying on the conversation is the existence of inter-racial relationship in the white liberal community as we see with Curt and Ifemelu in America and Georgina and Emenike and his friends in London. The blindness of white liberal American middle class to the reality of the disconnection between their expressed passion for the course of equality and justice for all people of colors and minority and their unwittingly silent perpetuation of racist imagination is one of Adichie's thematic concern in *Americanah*. As Adam Kirsch notes, the fear to bring up race in conversation, "the complacent hypocrisy of white Americans about race" and "the unspoken rules and expectations of both whites and blacks" are parts of obstacles to racial equality and justice (*The Global Novel* 65-66). Racial discourse is often avoided, an unpleasant and slippery topic that some white characters avoid discussing. Even for some white liberals who live the cosmopolitan ideal of non-discriminatory practices in racial relations, including those in romantic relations with blacks, the "unspoken rules and expectations" about stratified racial relations are kept. Indeed, best-intentioned whites like Curt, Ifemelu's boyfriend fail to grapple with the depth of racial infraction in his relationship with her, but rather chooses to believe that the very existence of their relationship is a proof that he has significantly bridged the gulf created by racial

discrimination. He chooses to believe this premature assertion and sees himself as an advocate for racial equality. But feebleness of that perception is soon put to test by Ifemelu.

The weakness of his position is betrayed in an argument with Ifemelu over *Essence* magazine she was reading in which is featured “only black women” (296). Curt claims that the “magazine is kind of racially skewed.” To show and educate Curt over what she considers truly racially skewed, she leads him to a bookstore where several versions of women's magazines are on display. She then takes him on a visual journey through the magazine covers and inner pages as well to show how white women are the dominant hair and beauty models. Of the two thousand pages gleaned, Curt counts out three and at most four black models. In some cases, the choices of black or brown model are not easily deciphered because their skin tone is very light:

So three black women in maybe two thousand pages of women's magazines, and all of them are biracial or racially ambiguous, so they could also be Indian or Puerto Rican or something. Not one of them is dark. Not one of them looks like me, so I can't get clues for makeup from these magazines. Look, this article tells you to pinch your cheeks for color because all their readers are supposed to have cheeks you can pinch for color... This says that this pink lipstick is universal, but they mean universal if you are white because I would look like a golliwog if I tried that shade of pink. Oh, look, here is some progress. An advertisement for foundation. There are seven different shades for white skin and one generic chocolate shade, but that is progress. Now, let's talk about what is racially skewed. (297)

Not only is blackness or dark hues of blackness erased from pages of lifestyle magazines and other examples of cultural productions available for public consumption, but candid stories about black experiences of racism are muted as well. Ifemelu did not spare this candidness in speaking with her white liberal friends on the troubling real presence of racism in America. Ifemelu's gutsy conversations with her white liberal American friends, including her white American boyfriend correlate with and confirm Yancy's observation from his conversation with white Americans about the reality of race in America "that they have been seduced by the shadows of a 'postracial' American cave, as it were. They have failed to see the reality of how race operates in insidious ways and how they are complicit with it" (*On Race* 7)

This point is illustrated differently in Shan's bitter experience with her editor in the process of trying to publish her memoir. Shan is older sister to Blaine, Ifemelu's African American boyfriend. Shan's memoir reflects true life experiences of racism, but her editor insists she tweaks the book in a way that it "transcends race" (335). Not only is her white editor disconnected from day to day reality of black struggle with racial equality, he also tries to numb the sharp references to them in Shan's story. So, when she narrates the experience of her Gambian friend whose white boyfriend is leaving his white wife for, Shan calls attention to the racism contained in a statement made by Peter, one of their white friends from Wisconsin to the effect that the Gambian white boyfriend's wife must feel worse knowing she is losing her husband to a black girl. "So I put it in the book and my editor wants to change it because he says it's not subtle. Like life is always fucking subtle" (336). Then there is the story of her mom's experience of racism at work and her editor says, "Can we have more nuance?" Did your mom have a bad rapport with

someone at work, maybe? Or had she already been diagnosed with cancer? He thinks we should complicate it, so it's not race alone. And I say, But it was race" (336). Basically, the editor represents a cut of the society that finds story or novel about race by African Americans uncomfortable and of little interest, unless of course the story is rendered subtle and nuanced. An African American woman like Shan telling sincere stories of racism is "labeled angry and shunned" (338), but a non-American black woman like Ifemelu is able to do so because she is African and "she's writing from the outside. She doesn't really feel all the stuff she's writing about" (337).

The conflict of positions on the experience of racism for an African American and African immigrant comes to readers' attention here and in the differences of experience of racism as opined by Shan points to a possible sundering of possible Pan-Africanism or diaspora solidarity between the two social categories of blacks in America. As Louis Chude-Sokei argues in confirmation, "given the sometimes stark differences between the social performance and cultural positions of African immigrants in the United States and those of black Americans, the very notion that racism is a suturing factor or a shared catalyzing burden is no longer to be taken for granted" ("The Newly Black American" 55). To some extent, "writing from the outside," as an African immigrant, Ifemelu is spared some scrutiny and censorship Shan experiences- but in this case Ifemelu's genre of writing, a blog, makes it easier for her to escape such censorship, nevertheless Ifemelu is not spared the skin-color prejudice that is common to African Americans like Shan.

As instances in the novel indicate, Shan's assertion that non-American blacks don't experience racism as American blacks do is not the case; racism as a matter of fact does not distinguish between American black and non-American black. A greater portion

of Ifemelu's blog is written not only from her observations of racism in the American society, but also from her own lived experience of racism in a pre-and a post Obama era. Central to her observation and experience of racism is constant references to hair, the hair motif runs across the novel. Ifemelu was once turned away when she wanted her eyebrow waxed at a hair salon. "We don't do curly," the Asian woman behind the counter told her (294). Curt later came in to threaten to get the salon's license revoked if they don't get his girlfriend's eyebrow waxed. The salon attendants are shocked to find her dating a white guy. Other white friends of Curt are also bewildered that Curt is dating a black girl and "it did not help that although she might be a pretty black girl, she was not the kind of black that they could, with an effort, imagine him with: she was not light-skinned, she was not biracial" (295).

Like Teju Cole's Dr. Mailotte character in *Open City* whom we will meet in Chapter 3, Curt's mother claims that the contemporary America is color-blind. Contrary to Curt's mother's negative reaction to a Sunday newspaper report on some people "still looking for reasons to complain even though America was now color-blind" (295), it is indicative of Ifemelu's story and blogs that race still matters in the way American society imagines itself. It is embedded in the psyche of the nation. *Americanah* revisits and represent Du Bois' claim that entrenched color-based social segregation is the problem of our time. Opening the wounds of the past, in this case, opening what Ifemelu consistently describes as an uncomfortable conversation on race, even in the aftermath of Obama's election should not be considered "antique" or "ahistorical" engagement. Also, discussing race is not to condemn all white discussants as racist, though they could be by refusing to engage in the discussion of why America is not a color-blind country yet. To

not want to discuss race issues or existence of racism in our current era of globalization could be rooted in the way racism has become subtle for most part and existence of a relatively few number of overt white racist like Taylor Spencer.

How is one a racist anyway? Are there still racist in America? The current attention and popularity of the white supremacist, Taylor Spencer among his white followers perhaps negates this question. However, Ifemelu addresses this foundational question in one of her blog posts:

In America, racism exists but racists are all gone. Racists belong to the past.

Racists are the thin-lipped mean white people in the movies about the civil rights era. Here's the thing: manifestation of racism has changed but the language has not. So if you haven't lynched somebody then you can't be called racist. If you are not a bloodsucking monster, they you can't be called a racist. Somebody has to be able to say that racists are not monsters. They are people with loving families, regular folks who pay taxes. Somebody needs to get a job of deciding who is racist and who isn't. Or maybe it's time to just scrap the word "racist."

Find something new. Like Racial Disorder Syndrome. And we could have different categories for sufferers of this syndrome: mild, medium and acute. (316)

Manifestation of racism has changed from the overt form of the Civil Rights era. In our time we may not find a lot of racists who fit into the white racist figures we see in race

centered movies²³ that have come in an avalanche in the last five years but that does not mean there are no racists still. Maybe the language used to describe someone who looks down on the Other, that is, a person of color as inferior needs to be called by a new name to create a possibility for someone who practices prejudices based on race can be held accountable. Ifemelu's suggestion appears satirical and humorous, but Racial Disorder Syndrome (RDS) do takes the harshness out of the word, "racist." What also comes up in her blog post on defining racist is an opening for a discussion of the different degrees of racism suffered by its victims. In short, do all experience racism in the same way? How are the experiences of racism different between American Blacks and Non-American Blacks?

The historical consciousness and continuity of race in America and discordant reaction to it is not limited to white Americans, the complexity of it is seen in how American blacks and Non-American blacks, that is immigrant blacks perceive it. It come for example in the form of being sensitive to politically correct way of identifying blacks that is rooted in racial history. For African immigrant like Wambui from Kenya, there is no problem with leaving literary documentation of black in its original form, but for a Black American, it is a different response. In Professor Moore's class on historical representation of blacks in film, there is a concern raised by Wambui on why the word

²³ Between 2012 and 2016, Hollywood has been able to finance successful Black civil rights movie like *Django Unchained*, *42*, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*, *12 Years a Slave*, *Selma*, *Butler*, *Fruitvale Station*, etc. The relatively limited number of Hollywood films on Black experience itself reflects the racial inequality that still exists in Hollywood despite some improvement in 2013.

“nigger” is bleeped out. A literary companion to this would-be Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* which is a satirical critique of racism but has received negative criticism for its use of racial stereotypes and racial slur, “nigger.” While the African American character is more sensitive to its usage and connotation, the African immigrant, Wambui is focused on portraying the reality of the time. Not reflecting the time, including its language is a denial: “If it was used like that, then it should be represented like that. Hiding it doesn’t make it go away” (139). What is going on around this conflict between two black ladies on the topic of racism is more than the insensitivity on the part of the African immigrant, it is the boldness to get a conversation on it in motion, no matter how insensitive it may sound. Conversation on race needs to even take place among blacks as much as it is between blacks and white as Ifemelu clearly demonstrates during her diversity talk titled “How to Talk About Race with Colleagues of Other Races” (306). Being conscious of blackness is different between American Black and Non-American Black. As the hostile engagement on the use of the word “nigger” between Wambui and her African American classmate indicates, black African immigrants though experience racism but not always with the same deep and complex consciousness as African Americans.

As Ifemelu herself expresses earlier, “I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America” (292); race was not a reality for her until she came to America, her experience of blackness as a disturbing reality begins in America. Unlike African Americans who have memories and living experiences of Jim Crow laws, segregation, substandard education, ghetto residences, limited access to health care and jobs and other

discrimination due to the color of their skin, African immigrants like Ifemelu do not have such and only come to experience part of it until their migration to America. Similarly, Wambui like Ifemelu had no experience of racism prior to coming to America. Candid and direct as Wambui may sound in her exchanges with her African American classmates, she fails to help promote a healthy conversation on race between the two.

The tensed discussion on racial language between two blacks, an African American and black African immigrant throws further light on Ifemelu's observation and exploration of the complexity of the layers of race and racism in the world. It also suggests that the old black American racial narrative is not in decline but as a matter of fact has taken on different forms. If two blacks are in conflict over a racial slur tag for their common race, it suggests that there is more to being black in the black community than it appears on the surface. On one hand, on a global level, blackness gets variety of responses. On the other hand, blackness within black communities itself is not a simple matter.

On the global level, different shades of blacks get diverse types of responses. A return to Obama puts this in perspective. As a bi-racial Black American, the notion of being visibly black often comes up in discussion. Shan and Ifemelu's discussion on different experiences of race in America despite being black leads to Ifemelu's blog on different forms of blackness that Obama's black identity raises: "Is Obama Anything but Black?

So lots of folks-mostly non-black-say Obama's not black, he's biracial, multiracial, black-and-white, anything but just black. Because his mother was white. But race is not biology, race is sociology. Race is not genotype; race is

phenotype. Race matters because of racism. And racism is absurd because it's about how you look. Not about the blood you have. It's about the shade of your skin and the shape of your nose and the kink of your hair. Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass had white fathers. Imagine them saying they were not black.

Imagine Obama, skin the color of a toasted almond, hair kinky, saying to a census worker-I'm kind of white. Sure you are, she'll say. Many American Blacks have a white person in their ancestry, because white slave owners liked to go a-raping in the slave quarters at night...In America, you don't get to decide what race you are. It is decided for you. (338-9)

One of the issues Ifemelu raises in the blog above is the problem that could arise based on the shade of blackness one has. The lighter skin you are translates to a likelihood of a better treatment as a darker skinned black. With white as a foil, blackness has been "segregated" into classes. Black American as well as Non-American are likely to share this experience in common, the lighter shade you are, the chances you get closer to being accepted by the white community. Isn't that what "passing" is about? In some people's mind, Obama's election as America's first black president has a lot to do with his having a black mother; the lightness of black skin add advantage.

In another vein, another blog post on the same subject of blackness, Ifemelu shares the perspective of an American Black who writes on the disadvantage of travelling "recognizably black because there's all kinds of black and no offense but he doesn't mean those black folk who look Puerto Rican or Brazilian or whatever" (331). The status of being recognizably black refers to a very dark skin black like Hollywood celebrities

Lupita Nyong'O or Grace Jones. With such skin tone, a black person is differently by different people: in Cairo he is called "a black barbarian", in American South he is "a big black buck," in the German Black Forest, he gets a "pretty hostile staring," in Shanghai, "the staring was intense," in Delhi "it was nasty." (331). This dimension of blackness is troubling because it brings to attention the global dimension of race. The gaze on blackness and the prejudice that follows is not only from the whites. Even with fellow minorities, a very dark skin black man gets a negative response in terms of human relations. Living in a global era with broadening of mind, it is disturbing that blackness, especially of a darker hue gets subjected to a dehumanizing treatment across the globe.

Denial and Response: How to Engage in Conversation on Race

While on one hand, the persisting gaze on blackness with attending discrimination has become a global experience, there is on the other hand the denial or artificial invisibility of racism against blacks. In some minds, the argument that blacks are victims of systemic racism is seen as farfetched and could be reduced to the case of flashing race cards at any instance of manifestation of black cry against racial injustice. For some white Americans, including white liberals who stand with blacks in fighting for justice, there are still enduring traces of denial of racism or non-acknowledgement of privileges obtained in being white. The observation of a black African migrant captures this distorted perception. During her race several talks to white audience and on her blogs, Ifemelu conveys these observations. Denials of the reality of racism comes in form of various responses to her talks. One says she should be glad that as a black person she should be glad she gets to address multicultural and diversity workshops, which are

considered a big step in America that condoned slavery and practiced segregation in the past. Another response is to argue that blacks and whites have equal opportunities at achieving their dreams in America. This argument apportions personal blames of laziness to blacks who fail to succeed in America's free and fair world. It also makes a claim that what blacks are going through may just be a case of class inequality not racial inequality.

Even if it has to do with racism, which many believe has ended, but in any case, experience of racism is not limited to blacks, Jews and Irish suffered similar thing. This approach does not help promote useful conversation on race, Ifemelu argues: "Don't be quick to find alternative explanations for what happened. Don't say 'Oh, it's not really race, it's class. Oh, it's not race, it's gender. Oh, it's not race, it's cookie monster. You see, American Blacks actually don't WANT it to be race'" (326-7). These responses are denial of historical reality that affects blacks more deeply with more consequences on their present state than others. After all, the Jews control a lot of media and corporate world today despite the hatred towards them. Hence, the case of the blacks is more than class, it is a case of endemic systemic racism that makes a case for paradox in an era of globalization. To continue to maintain this state of denial thwarts effort at effective conversations on race. Ifemelu offers ways to change the conversation on race with special tips for Non-American blacks as well as American blacks.

On denial of white privilege, Ifemelu notes that some whites try to argue that poor whites suffer similar discrimination blacks blame on system of racism. Ifemelu makes a distinction between the two by noting that being black makes the case of poor black worse than poor white:

So this guy said to Professor Hunk, “White privilege is nonsense. How can I be privileged? I grew up fucking poor in West Virginia. I’m an Appalachian hick. My family is on welfare. Right. But privilege is always relative to something else. Now imagine someone like him, as poor and as fucked up, and then make that person black. If both are caught for drug possession, say, the white is more likely to be sent to treatment and the black guy is more likely to be sent to jail. Everything else the same except for race. Check the stats.... So the Appalachian hick guy doesn’t have class privilege but he sure as hell has race privilege. (347)

Distinctions made here between class and race goes a long way in putting to rest the claim by some whites that poverty is not peculiar to blacks, it happens to white as well. Instead of attributing it to racial injustice, reason for poverty and life of dependence on welfare, poor health care, poor education and living in ghetto-lies in class issue. The reason we have so-called “white trash” is the same reason poor blacks exist. But being able to pinpoint color of skin as the point at which a poor black suffers more than a poor white is a credit to the amazing insight of the African migrant blogger.

In another blog, she also responds to the claim that circulates mostly among whites that blacks are the privileged one in America because the bar is lowered for them and the whites are the ones who have to work extra hard to get into a job positions opened to blacks and whites. This notion is captured in her blog in the following words: So, there is, in much of America, a stealthy little notion lying in the hearts of many: that white people earned their place at jobs and schools while black people got in because they were black” (362). This preposterous claim is informed probably by the Affirmative Action legislations and efforts by schools and corporation to seek to higher blacks and

minority to show they support diversity by reflecting all the faces that make up America. But this is a mere simplification of the situation. Placing things in the right context and bringing a duration of historical racist practices into consideration, those arguments become inconsequential. Ifemelu makes this historical reference in her blog as she continues: “But in fact, since the beginning of America, white people have been getting jobs because they are white. Many whites with the same qualifications but Negro skin would not have the jobs they have. But don’t ever say this publicly” (362). Ifemelu’s observations here on race relations in America is, as in most other places, insightful. Her observation on race as contained in her blogs pinpoints “the gulf between what people say and what they mean” as one of the signifier of failures of cosmopolitan ideals of the West (Kirsch 67).

In the face of American first policy of Trump administration, there are challenges to fulfilment of cosmopolitan ideal. As Georgina, Emenike’s British wife says during Obinze attended at their home, American stress on American importance ahead others, a sign for exclusion, indicates obstacles to global integration. In reference to American nationalism she states: “But I do think the most troubling thing was the garishness of the nationalism” (274). Not disconnected to the American nationalism as Trump projects it is the fear that maybe racism has come to stay.

Considering the recent wave of racial tension in America, there is need to keep striving to keep the conversation on race alive. Approaching the touchy issue with listening ears and loving heart could be a viable approach to the conversation on race in the multicultural and global world that America is. Ifemelu offers suggestion on how to approach the conversation. The discussion on race should be approached with an open

and listening attitude. First, she highlights what to avoid during the conversations. Part of it is to desist from saying “But black people are racist too.” This will not hold water because “racism is about the power of a group and in America it’s white folks who have that power” (328). The other part to an effective and progressive conversation on race is for the one that wields the power that make racism possible to listen to the experience of racism that the blacks bring to the table of conversation. She makes it clear that this approach is not to apportion blame but to set the stage for true and realistic conversation: “American Blacks are not telling you that you are to blame. They are just telling you what is” (328). And she concludes with the all-important components of conversation: “Then listen some more. Sometimes people just want to feel heard. Here is the possibility of friendship and connection and understanding” (328).

George Yancy makes this request as well and offers it as gift to his American white compatriots in his controversial and socially inflammatory column in the *New York Times* when he writes: “As you read this letter, I want you to listen with love, a sort of love that demands that you look at parts of yourself that might cause pain and terror, as James Baldwin would say” (“Dear White America”). Perhaps, some will get it; perhaps, some will act.

CHAPTER 3 COSMOPOLITAN CONVERSATION AND CHALLENGE IN TEJU COLE'S *OPEN CITY*²⁴

“The memory of my conversations with him had convinced me to send him

Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism*” (*Open City* 186)

In Teju Cole's *Open City*, variants of the cosmopolitan ideal²⁵ are held out and examined to reveal their complex claims and challenges in a globalized world still underpinned by lingering individual national and cultural attachments. My analysis of *Open City*'s cosmopolitanism is primarily and theoretically framed by the novel's reference to Kwame Anthony Appiah's book, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006). In light of the reference to Appiah's book on cosmopolitanism addressed in the context of conversations that take place primarily in Brussels between Julius, the central character and Farouq, his Moroccan friend, I engage in this chapter with a textual and theoretical analysis of cosmopolitanism. The allusion to Appiah's book by Julius in the quote cited at the beginning of this text is the basis for the

²⁴ Originally published in *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*. vol. 39, no.1, winter 2016, pp. 43-65. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2jf5q6xm>. See appendix A.

²⁵ In the Donald Trump era, this ideal is being challenged. With the adoption of American first approach to foreign policy, Trump is provincializing American relation with those beyond the US border. Judging from tough immigration policies to anti-global warming engagement with the rest of the world, the global intent of cosmopolitan spirit we find in Teju Cole's protagonist in *Open City* is under threat of blind nationalism.

theoretical approach to cosmopolitan discourse that I explore and engage with in the chapter.

Globalization as an agent of human and ideological mobility can be credited with hastening the decay of national boundaries and the resultant interaction and mingling of people of different national and cultural allegiances. Globalization's effect on the circulation of people and ideas across once highly controlled and restrictive national boundaries, has led to more and more people refusing to be restrained by a parochial view of others. Through this openness, they envisage a closer affinity with different "others" across national boundaries. Hence, a vision of a more cosmopolitan way of living is conjectured as part and parcel of the narrative of the nascent twenty-first century global community.

However, recent scholarly discussion on globalization has generated much controversy on what could be the incontestable conceptual meaning of the term. Perhaps a non-controversial and unifying position on the hotly debated meanings of globalization' and consequently, its contemporary uniqueness is how, as a process, it has created a faster and more diverse mobility of people and ideas across the global world (Gupta 1). The migration of people from one remote part of the world to another through more efficient transportation systems and the expansive media continually questions the capability of national boundaries to restrict citizens' embrace of multiple belongings and identities. Randomly defined boundaries that define and demand the loyalty of citizens of

imagined nations of modernity²⁶- a demand that precludes an extended equal commitment to strangers from different nations, a constructed narrow belonging to a geopolitical space is disintegrating in the postmodern global imagination despite the Trump administration or other right-wing movements' efforts to stop it.

Appiah's Cosmopolitanism in an Era of Nationalism

In an imagined cosmopolitan society defined as a putative world of the tolerance of differences or as an ideal multicultural and pluralistic global society where diverse social and cultural values mingle together in harmonious existence, the terrorist attack of the 9/11 constitutes an aporia²⁷. In fact, the nationalistic and religious allegiances that is imagined as a result of globalization, seems to have been diminished by the anti-cosmopolitan violence unleashed by the 9/11 terror attack. As a result, one must ask whether the currently circulating ideology of cosmopolitanism grounded in the central

²⁶ As Benedict Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, "Nation, nationality, nationalism-all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyze." Verso, 2006, p. 3.

²⁷ A major reason for the terror attack on the United States on September, 11, 2011 is the claim by a fundamentalist "Islamic nation" led by Osama Bin Ladin that politically, economically and culturally, America and the West are threats to the Islamic religion and nations and needed to be destroyed. In reacting to US policy as responsible for the diminishing of Islam and its culture, Bin Ladin referred to American culture as worst form of civilization: "It is saddening to tell you are the worst civilization witnessed by the history of mankind" (*"The 9/11 Commission Report,"* National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a485811.pdf>, p. 52. Accessed 10 November, 2017. At the root of the terror attack according to Bin Ladin is a clash of culture, the Western and Eastern).

principle of a shared universal goal that ought to drive the diverse people and cultures of the global society is a realistic, or sustainable one, all the more so in an era of right wing attacks on migrants.

It is critically important to analyze ongoing contentious conversations among scholars regarding the troubled and nuanced understanding of cosmopolitanism, especially its desirability and its very possibility in the context of simultaneous loyalties to national and cultural identities. In the first part of this chapter, I will review the scholarly conversations related to Appiah's form of cosmopolitanism in order to create a genealogy of engagement with the concept in Cole's *Open City*, which I will explore in the latter part of the chapter. This will require an exploration of Appiah's earlier scholarly work leading to the publication of *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* in 2006.

Generally, in his notion of cosmopolitanism, Appiah argues for the integration of two conceptually diverse forms of loyalty: the loyalty to humanity and the loyalty to nation. In the old classical sense of cosmopolitanism, Diogenes the Cynic declares his belonging to the world when asked where he came from: "I am a citizen of the world" (*Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 63). By this statement Diogenes rejects a restricted and particular allegiance to his native Sinope. The implication of this assertion is that cosmopolites relate to others, primarily on the basis of a commonly shared humanity and the ethical treatment of others on this basis. This stance curtails the excesses of crude nationalism that prides itself on belonging exclusively to a city or nation, which in practice often implies a non-extension of justice to others on the basis of an existing parochial belonging that takes precedence. Appiah appears to contradict this

classical understanding of a *kosmopolites* - someone who holds a primary allegiance to the universe over a particular place of origin. The seeming contradiction is not in any way a negation of cosmopolitanism that he espouses. His cosmopolitanism, as we shall soon see through a brief evaluation of its evolution and articulation, is a nuanced integration of the classical notion of cosmopolitanism and simultaneous reasonable love of nation.

Appiah's "Cosmopolitan Patriots" is a response to a form of nationalism that flows from pride in nation over the belonging to humanity that Martha C. Nussbaum condemns in her article "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." In response to Richard Rorty's essay, Nussbaum defends "the very old ideal of the cosmopolitan, the person whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings" ("Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" 4). In that essay Rorty encourages the American intellectual Left to take pride in a shared American identity as a way to combat internal national division created by what he calls a 'politics of difference' derived from personal affinity to religion, race and ethnicity. Nussbaum criticizes this patriotic approach for overlooking "a more international basis for political emotion and concern" ("Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" 4). For Nussbaum, in displaying greater loyalty to the nation over humanity, Americans are resisting the more unifying cosmopolitan ideal of world citizenship. She claims that our highest allegiance should be to the community of humankind, and the first principles of our practical thought must respect the equal worth of all members of that community (4).

Nussbaum is wary of a systematic defeat of the universal principle of classical cosmopolitanism by the American educational system. Though the patriotic oriented American educational system offers some concession to the embrace of universal human

rights values yet, she argues, the concession is insufficiently tailored toward embracing the universal because citizens are still taught that they are “above all citizens of the United States” instead of being taught that they are, above all, citizens of the world of human beings, and that, while they happen to be situated in the United States, they have to share this world with the citizens of other countries” (6). One other critique she makes regarding American absolute nationalism is the arbitrariness of the national boundaries that define their identity and belonging. This demarcation of place of origin as a definition of national identity is a mere accident, she states, and should not be allowed to restrict the appeal of universal moral norms which unite and define all humans. In her argument, however, she argues in tandem that while the stoic, that is classical cosmopolitanism stresses the universal, it does not ask that local affiliation be abandoned. Nussbaum did not emphasize the local affiliation in her argument because for her, Americans should already see themselves as “surrounded by a series of concentric circles” that unfolds from self and family, local community, to the universal, the humanity” (9).

In his response to Nussbaum’s thought on cosmopolitanism, Appiah argues in “Cosmopolitan Patriots” that the type of liberal cosmopolitanism he advocates does not contradict love of *patria*. Using the example of his own father, Appiah illustrates how the cosmopolitan ideal he supports is rooted in a qualified and reasonable loyalty to the nation. Responding to the criticism of those he describes as “narrow nationalists,” who upbraid cosmopolitans for their rootlessness, Appiah claims that contrary to their accusation, “the cosmopolitan patriot can entertain the possibility of a world in which everyone is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of his or her own, with its own

cultural peculiarities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different, people” (618). Appiah’s stress on recognition and tolerance of difference becomes even more justified in the age of globalization which has implications for the transnational movement of people, especially immigrants who make new homes and bring with them different values.

Distinguishing among related concepts that are often fused together, Appiah says that unlike nationalism-which is an ideology, cosmopolitanism and patriotism are sentiments that can be anchored in different political ideologies. However, Appiah agrees that ideals of patriotism and cosmopolitanism challenge his liberal ideology. The liberal lives on a principle that recognizes the dignity and rights of individuals. Therefore, the liberal will question the state if and when it fails to live by certain political principles. The liberal will “have no special loyalty to an illiberal state, not least because liberals value people over collectivities” (619-20). The liberals value people over nation when the nation tries to stifle the freedom of the individual to be different. The challenge of patriotism to liberalism pertains also to any ideology or view “that claims a higher moral authority than one’s own particular political community” (620) according to Nussbaum. But liberals can hold on to their love of nation, Appiah argues, as long as it respects the individual’s right to be different. The cosmopolitan challenge to liberal patriotism pertains to any act carried out on behalf of a nation that violates human rights. Again, liberals are quick to reiterate that any form of national support for “illiberal regimes” will be tantamount to a nation’s failure to safeguard liberal loyalty because liberals value equal dignity of all humans irrespective of their national belonging.

In contrast to Nussbaum's humanism which questions patriotism, Appiah suggests that liberal cosmopolitanism "celebrates the fact that there are different local human ways of being; humanism by contrast, is consistent with the desire for global homogeneity" (621). Furthermore, Nussbaum's form of cosmopolitanism alleges that nationalism is a "morally irrelevant characteristic" that hinders patriots from extending loyalty beyond nation. Nussbaum's humanism insists on respecting human beings as human beings while on the contrary, the liberal cosmopolitanism that Appiah supports speaks more of the human being as a person with an identity, cultural and national, a particular person more than a fellow human. The state offers the means of inhabiting this position by offering a commonly shared cultural value that enables a form of patriotism. Even though there are cultural varieties and differences forged by the nation and while there are disagreements based on differences, the liberal cosmopolitan argues that we do not have to deal decently with people from other cultures and tradition *in spite* of our differences; we can treat others decently, humanely, through our differences. The humanist requires us to put our differences aside; the cosmopolitan insists that sometimes it is the differences we bring to the table that make it rewarding to interact at all (emphasis mine) (638).

Appiah responds to the humanist challenge to patriotism with the example of his father, Joseph Appiah, who, as a rooted cosmopolitan was able to mediate the apparent conflict between the demands of country and humanity. Appiah adds that Nussbaum's anxiety over the restrictive moral quality of a patriot is addressed by a clear distinction between nation and state. The state offers the plurality that is the basis for the cultural multiplicity that cosmopolitan celebrates; hence we need to take the state seriously (623). Appiah argues for a state close to "a model of multicultural liberal democracy," (633) and

the American state in particular is a liberal one that supports the liberal principles of respect for individual autonomy and freedom of choice. Liberal principles of individual autonomy and tolerance of individual differences offered by American political institutions account for the patriotism that Richard Rorty clamors for but which, as Appiah contends, Nussbaum's humanist cosmopolitanism finds inimical to compassion for others on the basis of their humanity. This explains why patriots will take pride in national identity and defend it against any threat. As long as the state supports liberal principles, it is possible to be simultaneously a cosmopolitan as well as a patriot.

“New” Cosmopolitanism: A Global or Local Engagement?

While Appiah argues in his works that holding a cosmopolitan view does not conflict with patriotism, Bruce Robbins in his book, *Perpetual War* is careful to point out how such a view of cosmopolitanism accelerates the deactivation of detachment principle that guides cosmopolitanism. Intervening in the debate on the problems of cosmopolitanism and patriotism raised by Nussbaum's humanism refuted by Appiah, Robbins recognizes a number of scholars who, following the frame of Appiah's argument equally dispute Nussbaum's approach to cosmopolitanism on the basis that it is lacking in material and concrete reality. This new cosmopolitanism that often takes on prefix adjectives like “rooted” or “indigenous” nevertheless fails to clearly invalidate Nussbaum's view. In the context of describing the bifurcation of the concept of cosmopolitanism in terms of the old and new, Robbins is wary of the watering down of an integral aspect of cosmopolitanism as an attitude that inheres in a world citizen who is radically against violence to another human due to a detachment from an excessive

loyalty to nation. In short, for Robbins, the anti-nationalist imperative of cosmopolitanism is lost in the new wave of cosmopolitanism: “Cosmopolitanism’s original meaning- the overriding of local loyalties by a cosmic, transnational, or species wide perspective- has tended to fade into the background, and it has taken with it the prospect that cosmopolitanism will interfere with the perpetrating of violence” (2).

One of Robbins’ criticisms of the new wave of cosmopolitanism is its evasion of the complexity of international problems that call for global interaction and initiative. In evolving to a “piety” which masks itself as “some sort of genuine virtue,” new cosmopolitanism cannot stand serious criticism as it sits comfortably in a political framework that avoids the complex demands of cosmopolitanism of the old form which strives to address the problem of militarism and economic inequality encouraged by world capitalist systems like the United States. Appiah’s new expression of cosmopolitanism has gained popularity in recent decades because it claims to address the conflicts that result from binaries of local/global, tradition/modernity, ordinary culture/high culture. According to Robbins, “it is also attractive because it takes attention away from other, still more unwieldy contradictions, like that between cultural inequality and economic inequality” (33).

The praise for new cosmopolitanism is also derived from its capacity for resolving internal cultural differences by virtue of its celebration of cultural pluralism. The individual’s freedom to express difference aids mobility and selective fashioning of self helps override the restrictive sense of culture. The new cosmopolitanism in contrast to the old cosmopolitanism “seems more accessible than the old, closer to the hybridity we already possess and merely need to acknowledge than to an ideal we might have to step

outside and fight for” (Robbins 34). However, Robbins’ critique of the new cosmopolitanism lies in his claim that it confuses “the new with the old, the descriptive with the normative sense of the term” (34). Robbins himself once was fascinated with the newness in terms of a concept that is socially and politically grounded rather than a detached one. But in his new understanding of new cosmopolitanism, its celebration of diversity has “largely been uninterrupted by issues of militarism, economic equality, and geopolitical justice, issues which are more readily taken up by the cleaner or older cosmopolitanism (34-35).

What Robbins seems to be saying is that new cosmopolitanism ultimately supports the triumphant patriotism that takes limited interest in the lot of other human beings who are non-citizens. The form of American patriotism that Appiah supports for instance may be reductively compared to Israeli patriotism which, in Robbins’ view is synonymous with Zionism. Consequently, Robbins warns of the danger of cosmopolitanism bowing to patriotism in the marriage of the two concepts as Appiah sees it. However, Appiah does not see a conflict between patriotism and the cosmopolitanism ideal because he claims in his argument against humanists like Chomsky, Singer and Nussbaum, that caring for others is more intense at the family level.

In essence, Appiah argues that caring for family and by extension, communities and nations who attract our attention is more intense and realistic than a general caring attitude toward a non-personal and concrete fellow human being. Appiah goes further to exemplify the practicality and non-conflicting possibility of the union of patriotism and cosmopolitanism in the example of his father, Joseph Appiah.

Robbins' response to this is that Appiah cannot know for certain that there is no conflict in the simultaneous love of country and cosmopolitanism in his father for we do not know from Joseph Appiah how and what he did to manage the demanding task of reconciling the objective conflict between national and transnational interest. On one hand, Robbins asserts, Appiah appears to be "magnanimous to his family" in portraying it as a postcard for his defense of cosmopolitan patriotism; in short, he did not evaluate his family critically enough. On the other hand, he appears to avoid taking note of the imperial posture of two of his self-professed mentors, John Stuart Mill and Marcus

Aurelius. Furthermore, he takes up this imperial posture with his use of expressions like "great empire" when referring to Britain and the Asante kingdom (37). This attitude reflects what Robbins describes as the "presentist impulse" of liberals to support the state for its affirmation of difference (38). This impulse, a reflection of liberal blindness to the dark spots of history also suggests the tendency to let go of the past evils of empire. As Robbins states: "In *Cosmopolitanism* the same temporality that quietly urges us to go easy on the imperial horrors of the past is credited with almost supernatural ability to resolve the contradictions of the present and future or at least to get used to it" (40).

The new cosmopolitan is implicated in the exploitation of others by the capitalist system through its greater focus on what we share together as individuals and the little or no focus on the disparity of political and economic powers among nations. Because of greater loyalty to nation, the degree of influence nation has on the individual's desire to offer help beyond borders becomes obvious. Appiah would argue that obligation to others by individuals needs to be based on a fair share of the problem and not on an

overburdening of the individual to the extent of sacrificing his or her comfort. He writes, “Individuals in the global North do not become moral monsters, if they fail to abandon their possessions, careers, and opera-going habits in order to devote their lives to humanitarian missions” (42). Consequently, an individual’s scale of responsibility is based on partiality for the state as an agent of individual freedom and identity. The support for the state also translates to a defense of the welfare state which provides a framework for firmer fusion of patriotism and cosmopolitanism (44).

Robbins’ criticism of Appiah’s new cosmopolitanism can be deduced from the former’s classical and old cosmopolitan viewpoint, a perspective with a deep concern and fear regarding possibilities of militarism and economic redistribution. What worries Robbins here is Appiah’s “new, dirtier cosmopolitanism and its support for the welfare state, which blatantly favors citizens at the expense of noncitizens, thereby risking an exacerbation of global inequality” (44). Robbins calls for a newer cosmopolitanism that does more than Appiah’s form of cosmopolitanism, one that strains “toward global justice that knows from the outset it is partial at best, limited and distorted by national self-interest” (45).

Cosmopolitan Conversation: A Conversation of Difference

The necessity and inevitability of conversations among people who hold different cultures and values are two aspects of Appiah’s detailed discussion of cosmopolitanism that are essential to my analysis of *Open City* but which are not adequately attended to in Robbins’ critique. While a universalist or humanist worldview devoid of provision for differences and an uncritical patriotism lacking in universal focus are obstacles to forging

a united world, conversations and ecumenical dialogues are considered effective means of bridging this disconnection. Indeed, Appiah's purpose in *Cosmopolitanism* is to bridge this cultural gap. His intent in writing the book he argues is to diminish the bifurcation of the world into the West and others, the divide between two ends of socio-economic class (xxi).

Appiah suggests a cosmopolitan practice that rests squarely on conversations with the cultural values of a different Other to the point of "getting used" to these new values. This does not imply an agreement or a consensus, but just a familiarization with the values of the different Other. Thus, the goal of learning about the civilization, arguments, and achievements of a different Other is a familiarization: "Conversation doesn't have to lead to consensus about anything, especially not values; it's enough that it helps people to get used to one another" (85). The cross-cultural conversation that Appiah proposes is primarily between two individuals, particularly strangers, and it is an encounter that is set in motion and based upon small things (not necessarily upon universals). From there, they discover more on what they do not share in common. This is what Appiah calls cosmopolitan curiosity (97).

By way of cross-cultural conversations, cultures interact, and communications occur. Cultures encounter each other and grow in the process. The interactions and interpenetrations of differences are made tenable on the basis of a common humanity and it is this shared humanity that demands a response to the call of a different and strange Other. The version of cosmopolitanism proposed by Appiah is thus human-centered, engenders a conversation and is open to differences offered by the human species. This cosmopolitan ideal is captured in the following words from the comedy *The Self*

Tormentor by Terence, an African born Roman dramatist: “Homo sum: humani nihill a me alienun puto. I am human: nothing human is alien to me” (Quoted by Appiah, 111). The point being made here is that a global citizen is an individual open to conversation with a different other because of a commonly shared humanity and in the process of cultural mingling a migrant is at home everywhere. “We do not need, have never needed, settled community, a homogenous system of values, in order to have a home” (113). Hence, a cosmopolitan welcomes differences while valuing an actual human being. This is what makes him or her comfortable with different places and people. The respect for human beings and of universality are what oblige a cosmopolitan to be tolerant of different others, of all people. Consequently, Appiah argues that “one distinctively cosmopolitan commitment is to *pluralism*” (144). The form of cosmopolitanism espoused by Appiah in *Cosmopolitanism* and in his other works on this concept is usually invoked in the context of the movement of people across boundaries and the consequent emergence of a diverse cultural spectrum. I shall now turn to the ways in which cosmopolitanism is taken up fictionally in Cole’s *Open City*.

Challenging Cosmopolitan Ideology and Identity

Open City revolves around the wandering of Julius, a German-Nigerian immigrant psychiatry intern living in the city of New York. His nomadic habit takes place in a broader frame of his travelling between the United States, Belgium and Nigeria. Julius lost his father as a young man, had a problematic relationship with his mother and had difficulty living in Nigeria. This led to his migration to the United States to study. His life in the US is troubled by a difficult relationship with Nadege, his

girlfriend, as well as problems of racism and nationalism. The solitary roving of this peripatetic across city spaces and national borders leads to the uncovering of layers of the forgotten history of racism buried in the memories and landscapes of the city. His constant mobility also brings him into contact with a variety of people and cultures in the cosmopolitan cities of New York, Brussels and Lagos. However, the narrative is also a journey into his personal life.

This migrant narrative portrays cosmopolitan lifestyles and characters and touches on a number of encounters and conversations between the protagonist and different nationals. What constitutes immediate and particular interest to me is an examination of the ways in which cosmopolitan ideology is expressed in *Open City*. I will analyze Julius' encounter with Moroccan emigrants Farouq and Khalil during his visit to Belgium. Afterward, my exploration will dovetail into an assessment of cosmopolitan identity built on the cosmopolitan ideal so envisioned. I argue that Julius represents a cosmopolitan aspiration to a worldliness not constrained by race, religion or nation. At the same time, as the protagonist aspires to practice the cosmopolitan ideal of openness and dialogue with a different other opening himself to the needs of a stranger, embracing and indulging in what Appiah calls "the cosmopolitan enterprise of crosscultural understanding" (*Cosmopolitanism* 132), he encounters challenges to the cosmopolitan ideal, even though this is an ideal necessary to navigate a global world of difference.

A focus on conversations between Julius and Farouq, a Moroccan Muslim living in Brussels, Belgium in a post-9/11 period, unveils a discourse of the cosmopolitan ideal in the form advocated by Appiah. Their conversations expose the complexity involved in living out a cosmopolitan ideal in a city historically structured for the thriving of such an

ideal. In Brussels, the principle of cosmopolitanism that Julius tries to live by takes on a deeper dimension when compared to his experience in New York. Racially-toned hostility is brewing in Belgium when Julius arrives. A seventeen-year-old Flemish boy has been robbed of his MP3 player and stabbed several times in a crowded open platform of the Gare Centrale by two other youths presumed to be Arabs. As a result of this, there had been a violent and racial backlash by the Flemish against the immigrants Arabs from North Africa as well as against blacks from Congo. “But the murderers in the Gare Centrale case, as it turned out, weren’t Arab or African at all: they were Polish” (*Open City* 99). It is not really the pure racism that reared its ugly face in this particular case that is damaging to the cosmopolitan identity of Belgium but the indifference to a violated stranger in a public space. The crowds of people who witness the assault do nothing, and just walk away, indifferent to the unjust violation of another human. The Bishop of Brussels jabs at the human conscience of all Belgians when he asks: “Where were you at 4:30 P.M. that day?” (98). The bishop’s homily lamenting “a society so indifferent that everyone around had refused to help a dying boy” speaks to the decay of humanistic values in the city of Brussels.

Whatever happened to the cosmopolitan vision of Brussels? In the imagination of Julius, Farouq and Dr. Maillotte-Julius’ white Belgian-American acquaintances, Brussels is presumed to be an epitome of cosmopolitan civilization similar to what Appiah proposes in his *Cosmopolitanism*. For Farouq, leaving Morocco for Belgium comes with the assumption of moving into a Europe alive and nurtured on a cosmopolitan ideal of openness to difference, cultural and religious. After all, to preserve and protect her historical antiquity from the wrecking violence of the Second World War, Brussels’

leaders declared “it an open city “(*Open City* 97) which literally spared it from bombings but also metaphorically implies that all peoples, not only Flemish and Walloons, are welcome to make it a home²⁸. Moreover, like other European cities, the flexible borders that mark the age of globalization now allow a faster and more fluid flow of migrants into Brussels. But the reality of Brussels does not merge with how it is imagined by Farouq and Julius. There is some oddity to how Mayken, a Brussels native, and Julius’ landlady during his brief stay in Brussels perceive or choose to imagine the city.

Mayken’s narrow nationalism is the telescope by which Julius envisions Brussels. In her understanding, the city was originally planned to cater equally to the Flemish and Walloons but the annoying reality on the ground is the influx of immigrants from Africa and the Middle East. This tip the balance in favor of the Walloons and other French speakers from other places to the supposed detriment of the Flemish. Similarly, in Farouq’s imagination, prior to his migration to Brussels, Belgium represented a receptive space to a different other, to a stranger which fits into an artistic representation of the place in the 1430’s work of Jan van Eyck where “Turks, Arabs, Russians all had been part of the visual vocabulary” (106). Ghent, as Julius reminds us in his reflection, is the place known for its openness, particularly to those from the Near East. Jan Van Eyck’s

²⁸ Cole is clearly referencing the title and events of Roberto Rossellini’s 1946 movie *Roma, Citta Aperta*. In allusion to the realist movie about the ironic sense of its freedom from bombardments in the Nazi-occupied city of Rome during World War II, Cole is drawing a parallel with Brussels, “an open city” violated by racial and cultural based hostilities despite being freed from military attacks from Germany and its allies.

paintings not only testified to the multiculturalism of the town but also “depicted himself in a large red turban” (106).

However, time wore out the cosmopolitanism of Belgium or reveals a lack of cosmopolitanism that existed. The “natives” have become hostile to immigrants, especially those of color. Strangers, Arabs and Africans especially, are not just viewed suspiciously as Mayken suggests, but are feared for being a threat to the resources available in this European cosmopolitan space central to the European Union’s goal of unifying the different cultures of the continent. More so, in the post-9/11 context, the immigrants are viewed as agents of Islamic terror, a fear based not on fact but on assumptions about strangers who are not Flemish or Walloon, those who are not part of the original members of the nation. In this projection of fear, the individual, Farouq for instance, is not evaluated as an individual human person but as a member of a different and threatening ethnic nationality whose goal in Brussels is to contaminate the purity of

Flemish society. In this frame of thinking and its assumptions about a foreign immigrant, there is no room given to conversation. The chance for conversation has been sacrificed on the platform of extreme loyalty to the nation, viewed in a monolithic mold exclusive of interpenetration with others who are different. The sense of cosmopolitan curiosity, an effort to learn about an individual’s cultural values and personal experience that Appiah advocates is never given a chance here.

Even a cosmopolitan elite like Dr. Annette Maillotte, could not carry out a truly cosmopolitan based conversation on the topic of Arab migrants to Belgium. A retired gastrointestinal surgeon with forty-five years of practice in Philadelphia, Dr. Maillotte, a self-professed atheist likes the cosmopolitan Brussels more than America. In her

conversation with Julius on the flight to Belgium, she considers Brussels home and opines that “it’s color-blind in a way the U.S. is not” (89) which explains her frequent returns to Belgium because she “can’t stand American public morals (142). Her cosmopolitan culture only reflects in her taste for music that is essentially western in form since it is mainly in the Jazz mode. But in regard to openness to cultural and religious pluralism, it appears that Dr. Maillotte chooses not to see beyond her privileged and parochial position as a white Belgian-American. Even when an attempt is made to set a cosmopolitan conversation in motion, the tendency is to approach the different Arab other as a non-appreciating nuisance. This claim is substantiated during a conversation over lunch with her at the restaurant Aux Quatre Vents in Brussels. Julius makes mention of a race- and religious-related experience Farouq shared with him at a previous meeting, implying that the Belgian society is not “color-blind” (89) as Dr. Maillotte earlier asserts during her conversation with Julius on the flight from New York to Brussels.

Presenting Farouq’s difficulty with finding acceptance as an Arab in Belgium, Julius tells Dr. Maillotte that his “friend’s specific trouble is about being here and maintaining his uniqueness, his difference” (142-43). When he asks her view on this claim, Dr.

Maillotte’s caustic remarks about Farouq’s choice to live out his unique life experience and difference in Brussels correlates with her justification for the unwelcoming postures of Belgian nation to the likes of Farouq whom she castigates for complaining about his suffering as if others didn’t suffer as well: “Our society has made itself open for such people, but when they come in, all you hear is complaints. Why would you want to move somewhere only to prove how different you are?” (143).

On one hand, it is quite perturbing that the same Dr. Maillotte who complains to Julius earlier that she couldn't "stand American public morals," hence her frequent return to Belgium, is critical of Farouq's resistance to the overbearingness of Belgian public morals on cultural purity. On the other hand, her criticism of Farouq is a misreading of the Moroccan view that each person comes with a unique experience and background, and in a cosmopolitan living, the differences are to be welcomed. He is not proving how different he is, but is just living out the values in which he was raised. It appears that Julius tries to take up the cudgel on behalf of Farouq by affirming that the émigré is not a resentful person but instead truly expresses a genuine hurt from the monolithic vision of Belgium being pushed down his throat in the society and especially in the University where he was studying. Ultimately, conversations between Dr. Maillotte and Julius on Belgian society's attitude towards immigrants and different cultures fail to produce any fruits of cosmopolitan curiosity.

However, hope for a useful cosmopolitan conversation is restored in the series of dialogues between Julius and Farouq who clarify the problem of acknowledging difference in terms of the value of the individual. The chance meeting of Julius and Farouq at the Internet and telephone café managed by the latter offers a hint to the central argument on difference proposed by Farouq. The type of multiculturalism espoused by Farouq is indicated not only in the multiple languages heard concurrently but also by the destinations of calls made in the café.

In Farouq's Internet and telephone call cafe, we see a miniature display of cultural diversity. There are Arabs and Africans making calls from different telephone booths to Colombia, Egypt, Senegal, Brazil, Germany, Nigeria and US. In reference to these cross-

cultural and cross-border exchanges, Farouq says to Julius: “It’s a test case of what I believe; people can live together but still keep their own values intact. Seeing this crowd of individuals from different places, it appeals to the human side of me, and the intellectual side of me” (112). Using Edward Said’s *Orientalism* as his inspiration, Farouq desires a situation in Belgium where all the different nationalities and religions are recognized and not merely tolerated. He wants recognition of difference with its own values. Farouq points to Said’s experiential relation to the Palestine/Israeli problem where it became clear to the critic “that difference is never accepted” as a platform upon which to argue that even when a Near Easterner’s difference is welcome it “is never seen as containing its own value. Differences as orientalist entertainment are allowed, but difference with its own intrinsic value, no” (104). In other words, a Near Easterner is accepted in the West on the basis of its presumed exoticness and for the purpose of aesthetic consumption but when it comes to worldview founded on the Oriental’s cultural and religious values, values that are integral to its identity, the West becomes non-receptive.

Farouq’s “difference” project is not only anchored on his understanding of Said’s *Orientalism*, it also resonates with Malcolm X’s principle of difference during the American civil rights era. Malcolm X’s appeal to the difference of black culture and experience is the basis of Farouq’s preference over Martin Luther King’s Christian

Universalist approach to dealing with racism against black Americans²⁹. Malcolm X “recognized that difference contains its own value, and that the struggle must be to advance that value” (105). Farouq would not concede to the practicality of Martin Luther King’s principle even after Julius explained to him its Christian foundation. He could not accept the idea of playing the “victimized Other” as an Arab living in a culturally monolithic Belgium, hence his affiliation with Malcolm X’s philosophy of insisting on living from the value of one’s cultural and religious heritage.

Perhaps what becomes an immediate worry for Julius is the violence associated with establishing and maintaining such different cultural and religious, that is, Islamic values in a Belgian society that has a narrow nationalistic imperative. The seething violence embedded in Farouq’s sentiment flies on the wing of Malcolm X’s choice of violence as a necessary method for bringing about the reality of difference³⁰. This momentary consideration of possible violence exploding from Farouq’s insistence on

²⁹ Malcolm X was very critical of Martin Luther King Jr.’s non-violence and integrationist approach and offered a different approach to gaining civil rights for blacks “which stressed the need for self-defense and political struggle waged by ‘any means necessary’” (108). See Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood. *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787*. Routledge, 2003.

³⁰ In some ways, Malcolm X’s turn to violence finds correlation in Franz Fanon’s philosophy of violence as a means to achieve decolonization and overcome colonial racism. Fanon writes: “In its bare reality, decolonization reeks of red-hot cannonballs and bloody knives. For the last can be the first only after a murderous and decisive confrontation between the two protagonists. This determination to have the last move up to the front, to have them clamber up (too quickly, say some) the famous echelons of an organized society, can only succeed by resorting to every means, including, of course, violence” (*Wretched* 3).

inserting his Moroccan value into the cultural bedrock of his adopted nation brings to Julius' consciousness the danger embodied in loyalty to nation or any cultural value: "It seemed as if the only way this lure of violence could be avoided was by having no causes, by being magnificently isolated from all loyalties" (107). Here, Julius' interior questioning of Farouq's loyalty to his cultural values, which comes with a risk of fanning racial violence, concurs with Martha Nussbaum's denouncement of primary loyalty to country or culture over loyalty to a humanist or Universalist principle. Nussbaum's ideal appears to be attractive to Julius in the context of the violence that Farouq's loyalty to his Arabic difference could foment. But then he quickly re-assesses his denouncement of Farouq's choice of loyalty with the possible violence that attends it, deciding that a rejection of loyalty to any political or cultural cause because of possible violence could be another form of danger.

Julius' disinclination in welcoming Farouq's approach to promoting difference in a hostile and violent society like Belgium has roots in the cosmopolitan ideal Julius lives by and that conditions him to resist any form of national or cultural claims. He appears to question Farouq's choice of embracing his own different cultural identity in a pluralistic society. Julius represents here a classical form of cosmopolitanism that prioritizes worldly or multiple identities over a particular one. His hesitancy toward Farouq's Moroccan loyalty as a migrant to Belgium derives from the nationalistic implication it may result in. A glimpse of this fear of a nationalistic attitude toward life can be observed in the discussion they have about Moroccan writers Tahar Ben Jelloun and Mohamed Choukri. Farouq argues that Ben Jelloun tries to win the Western audience by not being socially conscious and culturally positive in his portrayal of the Moroccan experience. He

then argues that Choukri, whom he prefers as a representation of the social reality of the Moroccan people because he lives among them and relates to their different cultural values better than Tahar Ben Jelloun who lives abroad. But the interesting point here is that Farouq clearly affirms that Choukri's novel, *For Bread Alone*, does not translate to "any connection to nationalist ideal" (103). In other words, Farouq makes a distinction here between loyalty to one's different cultural and religious values and loyalty to the nation that is intolerant of a different Other. This distinction is similar to that made by Appiah between discontinuing his loyalty to his country if it fails to live by certain liberal principles that guarantee respect for human rights of all groups and continual loyalty if the nation-state continues to uphold liberal principles of equality. Julius' fear of violence that may erupt from Farouq's qualified embrace of his different value and its acceptance in Belgium is subtly allayed in Farouq's affirmation of an anti-war approach to social problems and reflected in his statement on being a pacifist: "I don't believe in violent compulsion" (115). This sort of assurance becomes imperative in the context of the violent impulse that propelled the perpetrators of the terror of 9/11. Farouq is not willing to follow a mere emotional impulse that is lacking in critical evaluation in strongly asserting his different values. Farouq's cosmopolitanism is positively portrayed here. But a critical look at Farouq's cosmopolitanism also reveals a flaw in terms of its practicality. He fails to fully live by the ethos of the liberal tolerance of difference by his demonization of Moroccan writer Ben Jelloun who, like Farouq, lives in Europe. Farouq condemns Jelloun on the basis of the writer's choice of a different and contrary understanding and portrayal of their common native place Morocco in his novel.

Farouq's intolerance of a different view of Morocco from another Moroccan constitutes a defect to his cosmopolitan ideal of accepting differences.

Farouq's failure to tolerate difference, however, inflicts little damage on his cosmopolitan propositions for Belgium, claiming that people with differences can live together in one country. This claim is reiterated in an allusion made during a conversation with Julius at the telephone center he manages: "I strongly believe this, that people can live together, and I want to understand how this can happen. It happens here, on this small scale, in this shop, and I want to understand how it can happen on a bigger scale" (113). Farouq derives emotional and intellectual satisfaction from working in the telephone shop because the theory of difference he advocates is exemplified there. The cross-cultural interaction and harmony alive in his shop offer a proof of what he theorizes: "It's a test case of what I believe; people can live together but still keep their own values intact" (112).

Farouq not only firmly believes in a cosmopolitan celebration of difference, he equally seeks to understand its practicality on a larger social scale. Farouq's cognitive approach to the cosmopolitan civilization he visualizes for Belgian society is not predicated on the merit of a mere miniature version of it that takes place daily in his Internet and telephone shop- it also has an intellectual foundation. As a widely read cosmopolitan minded person³¹, Farouq is not only enlightened on the strength of his

³¹ Farouq's intellectual interests are vast and diverse. He reads and discusses works of Giles Deleuze, Walter Benjamin, Paul De Man, Edward Said, Malcolm X, Chomsky,

adoption of Said and Malcolm X's teachings on difference for his project. He can also critically evaluate what he considers the pseudo-pluralist principles behind Fukuyama's philosophy about the end of history which arrogantly argues "that the present reality of Western countries is the culminating point of human history" (114). Farouq rejects closure in the form implied by Fukuyama's theory of ideological history³² by adding a different ideological value to what is already present in the West, particularly in Belgium.

In trying to understand the practicality of differences co-habiting together in Belgian society, Farouq dismisses modern concepts like "melting point, salad bowl, multiculturalism." Rather, he sees the embrace of these terms in some Western countries as an indirect way of imposing their cultural position over those of the non-Western Others. He understands multiculturalism's claim in this guise as imposition of a narrow Western culture which he rejects. However, he reiterates his affirmation of difference: "I believe foremost in difference" (114). In addition to embracing the ideas of Said and Malcolm X, Farouq also borrows from Walter Benjamin's idea in *On the Concept of History* (104), and he believes "that his subtle revision of Marx can help" him "understand the historical structure that makes difference possible" (114). Also of influence on Farouq's intellectual formation is the Islamic philosopher and scientist,

Karl Marx, Benedict Anderson, Francis Fukuyama and others. Farouq wrote his controversial and discredited thesis on Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*.

³² Francis Fukuyama in *The End of History and the Last Man* argues that "liberal democracy may constitute the 'end point of mankind's ideological evolution' and the 'final point of human government,' and as such constituted the 'end of history'" (xi). Farouq would consider this controversial contention an obstacle to implanting what he considers a different ideological value he brings with him from Morocco to Belgium.

Averroes, a major influence as well on medieval Western thinkers. "Not all Western thought comes from the West alone," (114) Farouq adds. Farouq's eclectic borrowing from Western and Islamic Middle-Eastern intellectual traditions and the apparent harmonization of these different traditions point to the practicality of the cosmopolitan ideal he proposes for Belgium.

However, Farouq's desires must confront Belgian society as portrayed in *Open City*. His first experience of the country is colored by ongoing violence emanating from racially toned events. The native Flemish community is represented by its right-wing political party, the Vlaams Belang, whose supporters claim is about "reverse racism" against them by those who fight for immigrants' human rights. The locals attribute most criminal acts to Arab and black immigrants as illustrated by a journalist on his blog: "Belgian society was fed up with 'murdering, thieving, raping Vikings from North Africa'" (99). Even when it turned out that not Arab but Polish immigrants were responsible for the murder of the Flemish boy in the Gare Centrale case, and in spite of the efforts of the Muslim community to reach out to the white Belgians for a peaceful coexistence over the murder case involving a Flemish, discontent and violence against immigrants escalate even further. Cole reports on a number of incidents to corroborate the increase in tenor of racial based violence across Belgium:

In Bruges, five skinheads put a black Frenchman into a coma. In Antwerp, in May, an eighteen-year-old shaved his head and, after fulminating about *makakken*, headed for the city center with a Winchester rifle, and started shooting. He seriously injured a Turkish girl and killed a nanny from Mali, as well as a Flemish infant in her care. Later on, he expressed a specific regret: for having

accidentally shot the white child. In Brussels, a black man was left paralyzed and blind after an attack on a petrol station. (99)

The failure to respect human dignity shared by all, irrespective of race and color, and the failure to live out a cosmopolitan responsibility towards unknown individuals as in the case of the murdered Flemish teenager, indicate troubling moments in the aftermath of 9/11³³. These events contradict the “openness” implied by the centrality of Belgium to European unity and the flexibility of its boundaries that have permitted an influx of immigrants. Despite what appears on the surface as a cosmopolitan civilization in Belgium, what really exists in practice is a defiant clutch on an original idea of the country as a home primarily for the Flemish and to a limited extent, the Walloons as well. Other cultures and races are not treated and identified as integral parts of the national culture.

The race-based existential anomalies that take place in Belgium points to the conflict that may erupt when an appeal to the humanity of an individual is sacrificed for an uncritical loyalty to parochial demands of culture and nation. This picture of Belgium negates its old claim to cosmopolitanism. As the critic Henry Jenkins states, “Cosmopolitans embrace cultural difference, seeking to escape the gravitational pull of their local communities in order to enter a broader sphere of cultural experience” (“Pop Cosmopolitanism” 117). Cole’s novel abounds in examples of this form of embrace of

³³ There were cases of race-based violence and xenophobia reported across Belgian major cities in 2006 that appear to form basis for Teju Cole's references to racism and extreme forms of nationalism in *Open City*. See www.wsws.org/en/articles/2006/06/belg-j21.html

cultural differences in the person of Julius but his efforts to appeal to a commonly shared humanity suffer a setback in Brussels. The obligation of a cosmopolitan towards all human beings is not always met here. Racial prejudice and parochial imagination are still overwhelming. This is the challenge to the promises of cosmopolitanism that I have been analyzing so far. As contemporary violence against culturally different Arabs suggests in the novel, a cosmopolitan Julius is confounded by the reality of blind nationalism and racism in Brussels and its implications for him: "(T) he stranger had remained strange, and had become a foil for new discontents. It occurred to me, too, that I was in a situation not so radically different from Farouq's. My presentation-the dark, unsmiling, solitary stranger-made me a target for the inchoate rage of the defenders of Vlanderen. I could in the wrong place, be taken for a rapist or 'viking'" (106). Julius's expectations of cosmopolitan compassion to a stranger, a different Other, give way here to the lived reality of racism and xenophobia in Brussels.

Despite the glitches in Belgium, the aspiration toward a cosmopolitan ideal that extend beyond the boundary of Farouq's Internet and telephone shop remains a legitimate one. Brussels, as the capital of a global body like the European Union could have been a model for the realization of this ideal but it falls short. Based on Farouq and Khalil's experiences of Belgium, and of Europe as a whole, this location represents a failed dream for free expression of difference. Farouq indicates this position in the following words: "When we were young, he said, I should say, when I was young, Europe was a dream. Not just a dream, it was the dream: it represented the freedom of thought. We wanted to come here, and exercise our minds in this free space.... But I have been disappointed. Europe only looks free. The dream was an apparition" (122). Khalil echoes Farouq's

declaration afterward when he says, “Europe is not free” (122). This assertion interestingly inspires his aim to understand why it is so and argue for the possibility of its reversal. Despite all the disappointment he encounters, Farouq continues to nurse a desire to understand how a cosmopolitan ideal of acceptance of difference can take place in Belgium.

The answer to how this can happen is not clearly given in Cole’s *Open City* and perhaps the writer had no such intention to provide it. Nevertheless, Julius suggests that the potential for a productive epistemological approach to the quest could be traced from Kwame Anthony Appiah’s *Cosmopolitanism* when he mails a copy of the book to Farouq from the US. Julius carries memories of his cosmopolitan conversations with Farouq long after he returns to New York. “The memory of my conversations with him had convinced me to send him Kwame Anthony Appiah’s *Cosmopolitanism*. I sealed the envelope, and the postal worker showed me various booklets of stamps. No flags, I said, something more interesting” (186). Even during this narrative moment in the post office Julius faces and tries to avoid nationalistic shadows, when he presumes what the postage stamp carrying the American flag might indicate to Farouq. But he can only resist the claim of belonging for a moment because coincidentally, while he is in the process of carrying out his business in the post office, the clerk there named Terry recognizes and addresses him in terms of racial and nationalistic origin: “Say brother, where are you from? ‘Cause, see, I could tell you were from the Motherland” (186).

Julius’ resistance to being addressed and claimed on the basis of his African roots and his rejection of this restrictive identity constitute a different form of challenge to the cosmopolitan ideology he strives to live by. At different times in his meeting and

conversations with Dr. Maillotte and Farouq, Julius diplomatically avoids dwelling on where he comes from. He does not easily claim a particular national identity even if he admits at one time to be a Yoruba Nigerian and at another time, an American. At other moments, he tries to assert his German heritage. It is obvious that Julius strives to fashion his identity as he chooses to reflect his cosmopolitan ideal of embracing multiple belonging, the ideal world citizen. This ideal is tested a little in Belgium but takes a more complicated twist and turns in New York.

In New York, the challenge to the cultivation of a cosmopolitan lifestyle comes in multiple forms. I will now explore this resistance in terms of identity-centered discourses. Julius' embrace of cosmopolitan identity and the obstacle to this choice of social identification by way of narrow national and racial claim on him by others will constitute the context for this exploration. Like the numerous birds he refers to during his observations as he walks, Julius embodies their ability to see a more comprehensive view of the "open city" of New York. Through his bird-eye view, he unveils layers and varieties of hidden stories embedded in the cosmopolitan city. It is pertinent to note that the cities that Julius navigates in the novel, New York and Brussels, are cosmopolitan in many regards but especially in the diversity of people, particularly regarding the combination of native born citizens and immigrants who, on the basis of a common goal, try to weave their differences into a mosaic. As Gupta states, these global cities are "simply enormously cosmopolitan-these are nodes of immigration and global movement, so that they present an extraordinary mosaic of diverse populations coexisting and cohabiting" (*Globalization and Literature* 39).

Cosmopolitan Contradictions: A Cosmopolitan Resistance to Native Claim

This coexistence is however not untroubled or without conflicts. Julius' major encounters and engagements with difference and diversity in New York offer a platform for analyzing another angle of the depiction of challenges to cosmopolitanism in the twenty-first century African migrant novel. Julius, the central character in *Open City*, epitomizes the nomadism and worldliness associated with a cosmopolite. As an immigrant psychiatry intern in New York he walks- sometimes aimlessly and randomly around New York to escape from the work-related stress and trauma associated with a recently ended relationship with his girlfriend, Nadege. His isolated urban wandering is not to be seen merely as a form of therapy from work stress and heartbreak but as the symbol of his desire for freedom from the confinement to a fixed space. Like the birds that he pays attention to in his observation of his environment, Julius navigates the city space untethered from any narrowing or constricting forces. His frequent walks lead to encounters, even if they are often in the form of a detached engagement with the diverse and different people and cultures he comes across.

Julius' interactions with the culturally diverse population of New York City support his cosmopolitan commitment to pluralism and mental curiosity about a different Other. In his lonely walks, Julius displays a cosmopolitan mind that marches in the magnitude of the city as suggested in his ability to switch with ease from speaking on history, biology and psychology, to analyzing literature and history that span across the Caribbean, Africa and Latin America. His vast and diverse knowledge is often accompanied by his curiosity and solidarity (even if often somewhat detached) with the

strangers he encounters. He is drawn to different individuals of different nationalities and in some cases, enters into their lives to share in their experiences.

But unlike in Brussels where he engaged in an intimate and interactive way with people he encountered, in New York, his rapport with most people he comes across is less familiar. Even when his acquaintances are his own next-door neighbors, Julius is not curious enough to know about them or share in their life experiences. He fails to notice either their presence or absence or the events that are unfolding in their lives. On one occasion when he runs into Seth, the neighbor in question, he decides to ask Carla about his partner only to be told she had died months earlier.

Julius' lack of attention to Seth and Carla who are spatially closer to him than the "others" he encounters contradicts his cosmopolitan and humanist character. He is totally confused by how blind he was to their plight. For someone who is driven by the ideal of responsibility to others, the failure to notice and to share in the suffering of his neighbors is a lacuna.

In contrast to this failure to display cosmopolitan curiosity and compassion toward his neighbors, we find examples of his compassion and friendship in his relationship with Dr. Saito, his literature class professor, and Saidu, a Liberian refugee. With Dr. Saito, Julius spends time and makes sacrifices to listen patiently to him as he gets closer to death. Julius' sympathetic and attentive traits are plainly displayed as he spends more and more quality time with this dying man. With Saidu, an undocumented immigrant he visits with Nadege at a holding facility in Queens, Julius reveals a compassionate disposition as he listens patiently to the incredible story of the Liberian who travelled to the US with a Cape Verdean passport made for him by a Mozambican

while he was in Spain: “I was the listener, the compassionate African who paid attention to the details of someone else’s life and struggle. I had fallen in love with that idea myself” (70).

Julius’ idea of himself as a compassionate person interested in the lives of others corresponds to what appears to be Cole’s invitation to readers to view Julius as an incarnation of the cosmopolitan ideal of responsibility to the lot of another human being. However, this humanistic ideal that Julius often tries to put into practice, a pure concern for others based on a shared common humanity, and not on a racial or nationalist interest is frequently challenged by his encounters with Africans and Caribbean nationals who try to “claim” him as one of their own. In one instance, an African cabdriver feels offended that Julius fails to fraternize with him when he boards his taxi. The unnamed cab driver responds coldly to Julius’ greetings: “Not good, not good at all, you know, the way you came into my car without saying hello, that was bad. Hey, I’m African just like you, why you do this?” (40). Julius’ response to the drivers’ complaint sounded apologetic but was less than sincere: “I said, I’m sorry about it, my mind was elsewhere, don’t be offended...I wasn’t sorry at all. I was in no mood for people who tried to lay claims on me” (40). When Julius later evaluates the friction between himself and the taxi driver, he realizes that the driver feels unacknowledged and expects his fellow African brother to at least give him that friendly recognition. In another instance, a Caribbean museum security officer runs into him in a restaurant and shows interest in knowing about his African background. This upsets Julius as he sees this as another case of an African trying to claim him.

These instances of Julius's harsh response to Africans and West Indians who try to "claim" him, as he says, illustrate his desire for building a cosmopolitan relationship tied primarily to individuals as human not as a fellow tribal or country man. But paradoxically, in a similar situation when Dr. Mellolite, begins a friendly conversation with him by making references to his African background, Julius does not respond in the same irritable and detached way he did to the Africans who come along his path during his walks within the city of New York. This contradicts Julius's claim to cosmopolitan compassion for another human being.

The instances identified and discussed above and others in the novel indicate a problem with the principle of cosmopolitanism that Julius aspires to. While on one hand, Julius reflects a cosmopolitan attitude by virtue of constructing a detachment from a particular and fixed belonging and by involvement with a diversity of people and cultures, on the other hand, he fails to capture the cosmopolitan spirit of care and respect for others by the very act of deliberate detachment from a provincial belonging and aloofness toward those who make claims to racial and cultural affinity. This juggling of the demanding choices of detachment or connection with strangers is also reflected differently in terms of location. In New York, he appears to be very selective in deciding to whom he extends deep fellowship, while in Brussels, he seems to be display less caution in bonding with strangers. In Brussels he made acquaintances and enduring friendship with Farouk, Khalil and to a lesser degree, with Dr. Annette Maillotte, whereas in New York he mostly encountered strangers. He thus complicates the cosmopolitan call to engage all categories of people in conversation by choosing to engage some (Dr. Maillotte and Farouk) and deliberately ignoring others who happened to be darker skinned

(the Africans, African-Americans and Caribbean). A cosmopolitan attitude that Appiah proposes in *Cosmopolitanism* encourages a conversation with all, which would include those with pure nationalistic intent, with the choice of course of not having to agree with them. All in all, in Brussels or New York, Julius generally shows a concern for diversity and curiosity about others.

In the concluding chapter to *Cosmopolitanism*, Appiah reiterates the need for ongoing cosmopolitan conversations with the obligation to every human being as a central theme. Appiah's recommendation also comes with an acknowledgement that to practice the cosmopolitan ideal, the mechanism of the nation-state remains a necessity. He recognizes the problem with globalism, but he still insists on a cosmopolitanism that accounts for conversation, curiosity and engagement with other human being, especially individuals not necessarily related to us by race, color or religion, the stranger. Appiah concludes on the last page of *Cosmopolitanism*: "If we accept the cosmopolitan challenge, we will tell our representatives that we want them to remember those strangers" (174). Perhaps, when Farouq reads Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism*, he will get a better understanding of how cosmopolitan life can happen on a larger scale despite the challenge it faces and how it continues to be a major recourse for a challenge to uncritical nationalism. As for Julius, he leaves us with reasons to question his outright commitment to cosmopolitan ideal. His rejection of fellow African "brothers" who try to identify with him racially complicates the cosmopolitan ideal and identity he seeks to promote. Unlike Ifemelu in *Americanah*, Julius fails to clearly and passionately embrace his Nigerian heritage.

CONCLUSION

Now is the transnational epoch of the contemporary African Fiction. The most widely circulated and read 21st century African fictions are global in approach, that is, for the most part they narrate experiences of African immigrants in the West as well as on the continent. In other words, the subject and audience of contemporary African fiction is a product of the processes of globalization. Therefore, for scholars engaged with the study of contemporary African Novels, it is imperative that they approach these recent oeuvres of narratives with the critical and theoretical tools of postcoloniality and globalization. These expectations are sensible ones based on the transnational and transcultural turns these new writings have taken vis-à-vis the African literary corpus of the previous generations.

As Simon Gikandi writes in “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality,” writers in the globalization and postcolonial areas of study have at least two important things in common:

they are concerned with explaining forms of social and cultural organization whose ambition is to transcend the boundaries of the nation state, and they seek to provide new vistas for understanding cultural flows that can no longer be explained by a homogenous Eurocentric narrative of development and social change. For scholars trying to understand cultural production in the new

millennium, globalization is attractive both because of its implicit universalism and its ability to reconcile local and global interests. (628)

With Gikandi's assertion in mind, it behooves scholars of African narratives of the 21st century to take into consideration in their analysis the impact of globalization and cosmopolitan ideals on African literary and cultural productions. The influence of migration and cosmopolitan desires on the production of the literary texts of 21st century African writers is without saying, a major and transforming one both in terms of style and content. The select writers studied in this dissertation are transnational figures. In other words, they are global citizens in terms of their multiple habitations in locations beyond their roots. As the late Richard K. Priebe notes, African writers are "the most transcultural and transnational group of individuals anywhere in the world." (qtd in Tanure Ojaide, "Migration, Globalization, and African Literature" 43).

Because of the increased human mobility and multiple belonging of African writers-expressive of multiple affiliation, with the increased availability of African fiction to a global literary world by way of translation, circulation and publication, 21st century African fiction is responding to forces of globalization, examining its claims, and in the process contesting and correcting them. In the process of this engagement with globalization, the diasporic fictions analyzed in this dissertation, I have argued, are renewing and reshaping contemporary African Literature in terms of the global identities of the writers, the cosmopolitan focus of their writings, the experimental and independent nature of their style and approach. In the embrace of the universal cause in their work which is not to say they totally disavow their connection to African nation-states- they are more individualistic and not constructed primarily by the concern to address the interests

of African readers. But in going global, I reiterate, they question the failures and imperialistic strains of globalization. And with the advent and global acceptance of 21st century African writers and their works, the canon of African literature is being challenged and reviewed.

African writers of the 21st century are cosmopolites and they are going beyond the boundary of the nation or continent by way of the content and style of their narratives; the global audience is central to the stories of Africa or migrant Africans that they tell; in some cases, these are their own stories as migrants who live in the West. This group of writers that has been referred to in scholarly works as Afropolitans, are, to put it in in simplistic words, young, urban and culturally global Africans with multiple identities or residing in multiple locations, who are cosmopolitan and stylish, who often have the ability to speak multiple languages and to mingle with people across the globe. This term was first used by Achille Mbebe but popularized by Taiye Selase, Leonora Miano and others.

Mbebe's definition distinguishes what Afropolitanism is not and the various spheres of life the term describes. He says that Afropolitanism is not the same as Pan-Africanism or negritude. In Mbebe's words, "Afropolitanism is an aesthetic and a particular poetic of the world. It is a way of being in the world...It is also a political and cultural stance in relation to the nation, to race, and to the issue of difference in general" (28-29). Being Afropolitan is a way of being African with a global view. In other words, an African who is not parochial or limited in perspectives. It is not a fancy and commodified identity without a political and cultural value as it has been received in some places. Afropolitanism, Mbebe further explains, denotes the global face and

features of the African, identifying Africa as a location in harmony with dispersion and immersion. For Mbembe, there is an awareness of the interweaving of the here and there, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice-versa, the relativisation of primary roots and memberships and the way of embracing, with full knowledge of the facts, strangeness, foreignness and remoteness, the ability to recognize one's face in that of a foreigner and make the most of the traces of remoteness in closeness, to domesticate the unfamiliar, to work with what seem to be opposites-it is this cultural, historical and aesthetic sensitivity that underlies the term Afropolitanism. (28)

Despite the strong political and poetic form that Mbembe's notion of Afropolitan carries, it is its commodified version that appears to have caught the attention of readers of contemporary writers and readers in the West. The inflection that Taye Selasi, a self-professed Afropolitan, gave to the term is the one that flies. Selasi, author of a successful first debut novel, *Ghana Must Go*, for which she won the 2014 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work, prides herself in being "local" to Accra, Rome, Berlin and New York. Born in London of Nigerian and Ghanaian parents, raised in Massachusetts and educated in Oxford and Yale, Selasi flaunts her cosmopolitan identity.³⁴ To be candid to Selasi, in defining this new generation of African in her famous feature in *The Lip Magazine*, she does not do so in terms of disconnecting the group from the political

³⁴ Selasi delights in being called a "citizen of the World" and when asked where she originates she would say, "I'm not sure where I'm from! I was born in London. My father's from Ghana but lives in Saudi Arabia. My mother's Nigerian but lives in Ghana. I grew up in Boston." <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/mar/22/taiye-selasi-afropolitan-memoir>.

realities of Africa nor does it intend for commodification³⁵ to be the outcome. However, she stresses the African niche of their globality, “We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world” (“Bye-bye Babar”)

The 21st century African writers whose works are addressed in this dissertation are Africans of the world by their concern for global issues, issues that have African connections but with global implications and impacts. Considering what it signifies, the era of globalization- a period of a phenomenal explosion in the magnitude of migration, of flows of information and more efficient transportation, this is the age that birthed the third generation of African writers and by their dispersion to the West, it becomes inevitable that the face of African literature must change.

Another significant feature of contemporary African literary narratives is the gender construction-most of the celebrated Afropolitans, the 21st century African writers are women. In the first and second generation, African literature is overwhelmingly dominated by male writers. In the contemporary trend however, we are seeing greater

³⁵ In Emma Dabiri’s “Why I’m not an Afropolitan,” she disconnected herself from being identified with the variant of Afropolitanism that is being celebrated in the media, the type that fetishizes and commodifies otherwise complex identity designation. She embraces “The enduring insights of Afropolitanism as interpreted by Achille Mbembe” for its disconnection with the essentialization of African identity. But Dabiri expresses deep concern about the celebrated form of Afropolitanism: the “problem with Afropolitanism to me is that the insights on race, modernity and identity appear to be increasingly sidelined in sacrifice to the consumerism Mbembe also identifies as part of the Afropolitan assemblage. The dominance of fashion and lifestyle in Afropolitanism is worthy of note due to the relationship between these industries, consumption and consumerism” <http://africasacountry.com/2014/01/why-im-not-an-afropolitan/>. Accessed 27 October, 2017.

proportion of African writers both on the continent and in diaspora made up of women who for most part is privileged to live in the West and integrated into her culture. The writers featured in this dissertation, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Chika Unigwe are part of this new face of African writers. There are other major writers like Sefi Attah Chinelo Okparanta, Yewande Omotosho, Helen Oyeyemi, Taiye Selasi, Aminatta Forna, Noviolet Bulawayo, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, Nnedi Okorafor, Alifa Rifaat, and Veronique Tadjo, just to mention a few. These African women writers for most part, write with global bent and part of the forces shaping the new African literature canon.

The dynamism of literary and cultural constructions in Africa gets the fuel that runs it from these contemporary writers of cosmopolitan and global fictions. The subjects of the literary works of these writers, while still connected with social and political problems in Africa, in most cases decidedly create protagonists who migrate to the West to escape unstable realities on the continent. But as migrants, life in the West exposes the dark side of the process of globalization: blind nationalism, racism, violence and human trafficking, as we have seen in the fictions studied in this dissertation.

In their engagement with these global subjects Chris Abani, Chika Unigwe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Teju Cole unveil to readers the ways in which globalization impacts events in Africa and how that impact connects Africa to the rest of the world. While embracing the dividends of globalization, they clearly trouble any premature claim to the success of globalization for Africans by defenders of globalization. As children of globalization, the 21st century African writers studied here also challenge the Eurocentrism and imperialistic potentials and proclivities of globalization. In being able to transact on these two paths, they inhabit the interstices of

globalization and postcoloniality that Gikandi refers to in his article cited in the beginning of this conclusion. As noted in Chapter One, the female protagonists in Abani's *Becoming Abigail* and Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* on one hand benefit from globalization in terms of migration and access to some form of economic empowerment. But the writers in a subtle way also link their necessity to have to migrate to the downside of globalization. In *Americanah*, Adichie's lead character, Ifemelu achieves her American dream as part of the result of globalization but she is clearly pointing out the failure of the cosmopolitan ideal in the persistence of racism in a major global space. Coupled with this, she returns home to signify the independence of the contemporary African to return home to realize her dream there as well. Empowerment is not what is always given by the West, since the African too has the will to succeed. Teju Cole's *Open City* is a shot at the possibility of an African with a cosmopolitan identity while combating the pull of nationalism. This is a pointer to the unfulfilled aspiration of globalization in creating a more cosmopolitan world. These novels by their content reflect the new direction of African literature, a new mix of the local and the worldly.

The newness does not consist only in the content but also in the creation of new forms. Since most of these writers are exposed to more than one location, so do they embrace flexibility and complexity in the form and structure of their writing. Tanure Ojaide highlights some of the areas third generation advances in the forms of literature produced by their predecessors. In "Migration, Globalization and Recent African Literature", Ojaide, a hard critic of the impact of globalization on African literature published in the West, claims that third generation émigré writers consciously pander primarily to the interests of Western audiences but are also deliberately more

experimental. This translates to the updated content and form of their work when compared to those of previous generations. Some of the new forms and content that mark the new African writings as identified by Ojaide include the adoption of the *bildungsroman* form (as we see for instance in Abani's *Graceland*, Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beast of No Nation*), the diminishing of creative works with reference to folklore and myths (Abani and Iweala are mentioned as being indifferent to African culture). He also identifies the preponderance of violence (again Abani and Iweala are identified as evidence for this claim); Abani is known to write around the issues of rape, drug use and the selling of human body parts, all having to do with violence on the body; the unique language usage catering to Western readers' tastes (the diction seems to indicate efforts to reflect the language of Western readers as in the case of the ideophones adopted for Agu, a child soldier in Iweala's novel); and efforts made by writers like Zakes Mda, Nigerian Sefi Atta and Ghanaian Mohammed Naseehu Ali to explain certain experiences to Western audiences which otherwise would not have needed explanation to Nigerian or Ghanaian readers; the stress on multiple belongings (Chimalum Nwankwo belongs in this category); and experimental themes in the works of writers like Tess Onwueme, Abani, Iweala, Ernest Emenyonu, Calixthe Beyala.³⁶

³⁶ In addition to Emenyonu and Beyala making references to gay lifestyles in their writings, mention can also be made of contemporary African fictions like Nigerian-American Chinelo Okparanta *Under the Udder Trees* (2015), and Somali-British Diriye Osman's short stories collection *Fairy Tales for Lost Children* which won the 2014 Polari First Book Prize where theme of gay and lesbian lifestyles of Africans in Africa and Europe are explored (*Fairy Tales for Lost Children*. Team Angelica, 2013).

These writers, the Afropolitans, are not necessarily interested in being made to carry the weight of writing on behalf of the African continent unlike previous generations of African writers, choose rather to be taken as individuals, and by so doing to complicate how African identity and writing is presented to the world. The global platform on which these contemporary African writers stand to show a new face of African fiction, however, raises afresh the perennial question: what is African writing?

It would not be unreasonable to say that the African experience with African settings and African realities should have primacy and legitimacy in forming the basis for African fictions. Even if Africa is connected to the world, some African writers and critics opposed to the dominance of the Afropolitan variety of African fictions would insist that stories of Africa as told by Africans with stable and continuous connections to the continent should rightly be called African writing. But part of the problem with establishing and sustaining this mode of production of African fiction would be publishing power. Very few publishing houses can sustain the type of African fiction that is indigenous, and home-grown. This is also connected to the issue of African readers in reading stories local to the continent instead of the stories of African immigrants who shuttle between the continent and the West. Even when African readers are open to reading works by African writers published abroad-and assuredly they are, they must contend with the limited access to these books locally and their affordability. In this respect, Bernth Lindfors considers the general dearth of the availability of contemporary

African writers' fictions published in the West on the continent as the "constraints on the globalization of African Literature" (17). While many African readers are not

necessarily opposed to embracing diasporic African narratives, some African writers and critics are not as positive towards their reception.

The South African young writer Siyanda Mohutsiwa belongs to this group of African readers. Mohutsiwa expresses the anger of some African based writer's hesitancy to celebrate the Afropolitan writers that are so celebrated in the West and awarded international prizes for their distinguished writings. Mohutsiwa rejects the variety of African fiction-stories about African immigrants in the West with their pandering to Western audiences. Rather than read these stories about Africans in the West, she prefers local African stories like those in the now-defunct *Pacesetters* series³⁷ that she claims do tell her own experiences as an African:

They were written for me. For three decades these books had been doing a very simple job: entertaining numerous ordinary Africans by telling exciting stories in environments we could imagine. They were not competing for the Man Booker Prize, and probably wouldn't make the cut for any contemporary short-story competition. But that's because they weren't written for the White gaze. They were not made to explain Africa to half-curious American housewives, or

³⁷ *Pacesetters* series are low-cost paperback novels published by Macmillan beginning in 1977. Written usually in the thriller and romantic genre, and authored mostly by Nigerian writers (even though Macmillan describes the series as "popular fictions written by African authors for African readers"), these novels were very popular because they were relatively affordable and as Virginia Coulon writes, "are concerned with Nigeria as a Nation. Patriotism and the sense of duty to one's country runs high in their work" (304). (Virginia Coulon, "Onisha Goes National: Nigerian Writing in Macmillan's Pacesetters Series." *Research in African Literatures*. vol.18. no. 3, 1987, pp.304-319.

homesick African students in UK. These books were written not for the purpose of lifting a mirror to the European psyche, nor did they need to tell yet another tale of the New York immigrant experience. The *Pacesetters* series sought to entertain, but in doing so ended up connecting (“I’m Done With African Immigrant Literature” np).

Mohutsiwa reflects certain worrisome concerns in some African literary circles about African immigrant novels written by Afropolitans-the connection of their writings to the way publishing and book awards operate in the West.³⁸ In this perception, the new African writers published in the West strive to appeal to Western audiences, tell stories of Africa that appeals to the mindsets of the West and place themselves in a position to compete for the numerous international book prizes sponsored by Western institutions. In other words, the context of African immigrant fiction is the case of he who pays the piper dictates the tune. These assertions may sound ludicrous but it is difficult to totally dismiss them with a wave of hand.

³⁸ There are several book awards in the West that Afropolitan writers have won. And indeed, some prestigious international awards like Caine Prize for African Writing and Booker Prize book awards have either been established for them or won by them. As Felicia R. Lee notes, “Black literary writers with African roots (though some grew up elsewhere), mostly young cosmopolitans who write in English, are making a splash in the book world, especially in the United States. They are on best-seller lists, garner high profile reviews and win major awards, in America and in Britain” (See Lee, R. Felicia. “New Wave of African Writers with International Bent” June 29, 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/30/arts/newwave-of-african-writers-with-an-internationalist-bent.html?_r=0 Accessed October 26, 2017/)

There are however certain African writers based in the West who do not fit easily into the category of the Afropolitans who seem to share the sense of Mohutsiwa's concern about the impression of the West on the new wave of contemporary African writers. The poet and critic Tanure Ojaide is a prime example. In his critical works, Ojaide is wary of the socio-cultural consequences the embrace of globalization and cosmopolitanism would have on the form of African writings heralded and popularized in the West. According to Ojaide on African writers, "the writer and literary critic should defend their culture in an age of globalization and inscribe it into the cultures of the world (3). Culture holds primacy for him. While he recognizes that culture is not static, it is dynamic he says. Still he stresses the importance of borrowing from the indigenous African experience even for writers with a global audience in mind. He is very suspicious of the imperialistic tendency of globalization and expresses this when he says that "Globalizationn is seen by most non-Westerners as a form of westernization of the globe and a phenomenon threatening to destroy cultural diversity" ("Migration, Globalization and Recent African Literature" 45). Stretching Ojaide's concern about failing to project African cultural heritage and interest by embracing and sustaining Western-framed motifs and style, it is within reason to argue that he feels African writers in the diaspora are unintentionally patronizing a Western literary agenda that African postcolonial writers of the first and second generations resisted and wrote back to. In a similar vein Mohutsiwa contends that the global turn of these writers betrays the African cause for the promotion of Western interests and thereby hinders the progress of African literature: "But African Literature cannot move forward if we celebrate themes that are centuries old. More

explicitly, African Literature cannot move forward with the most celebrated authors writing about Europe” (“I’m Done With African Immigrant Literature”).

Mohutsiwa and Ojaide here represent African writers and critics who in some way uphold the rule of diversity and difference in literary production but are at the same time they are keeping guard and policing the direction of African literature.

Achille Mbebe’s term, “the nativistic reflex” could be used to describe the parochial inscription of Mohutsiwa and Tanure Ojaide calling on African writers to emphasize and promote African culture in their writing. By the nativistic reflex, Mbebe refers to “an ideology glorifying differences and diversity, and fighting to safeguard customs and identities perceived as threatened” (28). On one hand, there is a legitimate concern to want to make sure the “local” is not swallowed by the “global,” but on the other hand, this concern fails to take into consideration the unstoppable impact of globalization on the reality of contemporary African writing, for good as well as for bad purposes. But as far as Ojaide is concerned, even though he lives in the West and professes belief in openness to diversity, he is undying in his critique of acceptance of the baggage of globalization which to him stands for the West in disguise. He strongly holds the notion that if Africans do not look inward into their cultural roots for models for literary forms and cultural productions, the literary canons of the continent are susceptible to a Western prescription and control. After all, Ojaide argues further, “As far as literature is concerned, it is a people’s culture that sets up a canon that promotes its classics or models that artists endeavor to attain or raise higher to an ever more sophisticated stature for adoration” (4).

As it were, the African literature canon as defined in the West privileges primarily the inclusion of African writings in English published in the West. African literature written in French or Portuguese make the canon in the West mainly by way of translation; so, in a sense, the location of the globally celebrated contemporary African writers and the accessibility of this variant of African writings in the West do affect the formation of an African literary canon. The fact that the writers write from the West has a strong role in determining what constitutes the canon of African literature in the global world. As Tanure Ojaide himself rightly notes, discourse about the African novel is “done in the context of globalization and migration which have dispersed Africans to other parts of the world, especially Europe and North America. (5). Hence, the global will continue to play a pivotal role in how African literature is defined and constituted in the West. Manthia Diawara reasonably crystalizes the essence of this blossoming, new African literature and the global identity of its writers and content: “The flowering of new African writers is “an amazing phenomenon.... It is a literature more about being a citizen of the world — going to Europe, going back to Lagos.... Now we are talking about how the West relates to Africa and it frees writers to create their own worlds. They have several identities and they speak several languages” (Felicia R. Lee).

As this dissertation has revealed, the contemporary trends in African literature, the global and world literature features of the 21st century African fictions of migration indicate a new phase of its literary evolution and illustrate its relevance and strength in determining the new canon of African literature which may not include African fictions written and published on the continent, but which does not necessarily exclude them. As Magnus Taylor remarks in her essay, “Where is African Literature at Today?” on the

evolution of Africa writing, the new writings are creating their own history and in the process “echoing the increasing political integration of the continent” into the rest of the globe.

The goal of this dissertation has been to bring to awareness the new face of African fiction in the era of globalization and how this new trend in African literature has extended the legacies laid down by preceding generations of African writings. In Chapters One, Two and Three we examined a select fiction by contemporary African migrant writers in English to showcase impact of the global and cosmopolitan ideals on these contemporary African narratives. It is my contention that although the works of contemporary writers of African origin that are examined in this dissertation tell stories of African immigrants in the West and have settings in the West as well, these “Afropolitan varieties of African fiction--stories about African immigrants in the West” (“I’m done with African Immigrant Literature”) as Siyanda Mohutsiwa describes them are legitimate African stories because Africa is now global. As Berthold Schoene writes in *The Cosmopolitan Novel*, “it is the role of art and literature to provide the cosmopolitan imagination needed to facilitate this fundamental shift in the way in which we conceive of ourselves in relation to one another” (183), Afropolitans, the global and cosmopolitan writers are writing new fictions-cosmopolitan fictions that explore the changing relations of Africa to the rest of the world. African stories can be global without losing their African identity.

WORKS CITED

- Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Hearth of Darkness*." *Massachusetts Review*. 18. 1977, <http://kirbyk.net/hod/image.of.africa.html>.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2014.
- Adi, Hakim, and Marika Sherwood. *Pan-African history: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787*. Routledge, 2003.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, 2006.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. W.W.Norton, 2006.
- . "Cosmopolitan Patriots." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 23. No. 3 Spring 1997, pp. 617-639.
- . *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton UP, 2005.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1911. Christian Classics, 1981.
- Asiwaju, Anthony Ijaola, "Partition Culture Areas: A Checklist." *Partitioned Africans: Ethnic Relations across Africa's International Boundaries, 1884-1984*, edited by Anthony Ijaola Asiwaju, C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1985, pp. 252-59.
- Barlow, Andrew L. *Between Fear and Hope: Globalization and Race in the United States*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

- Bond, Paul. "Belgium: Racist Murderer Linked to Flemish Nationalists." *WSWS*. June 2, 2006. www.wsws.org/en/articles/2006/06/belg-j21.html
- Clarke, Kamari Maxine and Deborah A. Thomas, eds. *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2006.
- Cole, Teju. *Open City*. Random, 2011.
- Coltrane, Scott. "Research on Household Labor: Modeling and Measuring the Social Embeddedness of Routine Family Work." *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 62. No. 4 November 2000, pp. 1208-1233.
- Dawson, Ashley. "Cargo Culture: Literature in an Age of Mass Displacement." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 38. no.1&2 Spring/Summer 2010, pp. 178-92.
- DeLaet, D. L. "Introduction: The Invisibility of Women in Scholarship on International Migration," *Gender and Immigration*. Eds. G. A. Kelson and D. DeLaet, New York UP, 1999, pp. 1-17.
- Doezema, J. "Loose Women or Lost Women? The Re-Emergence of the Myth of White Slavery in Contemporary Discourses of Trafficking in Women." *Gender Issues*, vol.8, no.1, 1999, pp. 23-50. //doi.org/10.1007/s12147-999-0021-9.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara and Arlie Russel Hochschild. "Introduction." *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. Henry Holt, 2002, pp.114.
- Emenyonu, Ernest. "New Directions in African Literature: Building on the Legacies of the Twentieth Century." *African Literature Today* 25, 2006, pp. xi-xiv.
- Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. Grove, 2004.

- Featherstone, Mike. "Localism, Globalism, and Cultural Identity." *GlobalLocal: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, edited by Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, Duke UP, 1996, pp. 46-75.
- Ferguson, J. *Global Shadow: Africa in the Neo-Liberal World Order*. Duke UP, 2006.
- Fitzgibbon, Kathleen. "Modern-Day Slavery? The Scope of Trafficking in Persons in Africa." *African Security Review*, vol.12, no.1, 2003, pp. 81-89.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, Pantheon, 1984.
- Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. Avon, 1992.
- Gratton, Johnnie. "Introduction: The Return of the Subject." *Subject Matter: Subject and Self in French Literature from Descartes to the Present*, edited by Paul Gifford and Johnnie Gratton, Rodopi, 1994, pp. 1-27.
- Gikandi, Simon. "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality". *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol.100, no.3, 2001, pp. 627-658.
- Giommi, Francesca. "Negotiating Freedom on Scarred Body: Abani's Novella." *Experiences of Freedom in Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures*, edited by Annalisa Oboe and Shaul Bassi. Routledge, 2011, pp.176-84.
- Griffiths, Ieuan. "The Scramble for Africa: Inherited Political Boundaries." *Geographical Journal*, 1986, pp. 204-216.
- Gupta, Suman. *Globalization and Literature*. Polity, 2009.
- Hall, Stuart. "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity." *Dangerous Liaison: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, edited by Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, U of Minnesota P, 1997.

- Hatton, Timothy J and Jeffrey G. Williamson. *Global Migration and the World Economy: Two Centuries of Policy and Performance*. MIT Press: 2006.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *The Philosophy of History*, Trans. J. Sibree. Introduction by C.J. Friedrich, Dover, 1956, 2004.
- Herbst, Jeffrey. "The Creation and Maintenance of National Boundaries in Africa." *International Organization* vol. 43, no. 4, 1989, pp. 673-692.
- Jay, Paul. *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*. Cornell UP, 2010.
- Jenkins, Henry. "Pop Cosmopolitanism: Mapping Cultural Flows in an Age of Media Convergence." *Globalization: Culture and Education in the New Millennium*, edited by Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco and Desiree Baolian Qin-Hilliard. University of California P, 2004, pp. 114-39
- Johnson, Charles. "The End of the Black American Narrative." *American Scholar*, vol. 77, no. 3, 2008, pp. 32-42.
- Kirsch, Adam. *The Global Novel: Writing the World in the 21st Century*. Columbia Global Reports, 2016.
- Kleingeld, Pauline. "Cosmopolitanism." *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics* (2013).
- Knox, Noelle. "In Belgium, Brothels are Big Businesses." *USA Today*, 11 April, 2003, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2003-11-04-beligan-brothels_x.htm
- Krishna, Sankaran. *Globalization and Postcolonialism: Hegemony and Resistance in the Twenty-first Century*. Lanham: Rowman, 2009.

- Krishnamurthy, Sarala. "Americanah." *NAWA: Journal of Language and Communication* vol. 7, no. 2, 2013, pp. 54-60
- Kumbalonah, Abobo. "'Stop Acting Black!': Black Conscious (Racial) Identities in Coconut." *JALA*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2013, pp. 115-31.
- Laertius, Diogenes. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Vol. II. Translated by R.D. Hicks, Harvard UP, 1925.
- Lewis, Hannah, Peter Dwyer, Stuart Hodgkinson and Louise Waite. "Hyper-Precarious lives: Migrants, Work and Forced Labour in the Global North. *Progress in Human Geography*, vol.3, no. 9.5, 2015.
- Lindfors, Bernth. "Constraints on the Globalization of African Literature." *J of the Annual International Conference on African Literature and the English Language*, vol.4, 2006, pp. 17–31.
- Mahler, Sarah J. and Patricia R. Pesser. "Gender Matters: Ethnographers Bring Gender from the Periphery Toward the Core of Migration Studies." *IMR* vol. 40, no.1, Spring 2006, pp. 26-63.
- Marques, Irene. *Transnational Discourses on Class, Gender, and Cultural Identity*. Purdue UP, 2011.
- Mbebe, Achille. "Afropolitanism." *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, edited by Njami Simon, Jacana Media, 2007, pp. 26-29.
- Milazzo, Marzia. "Racial Power and Colorblindness: The 'Sad Black Stories' of Kgebetli Moele's Room 207 and Twenty-First Century Black South African Fiction." *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*, vol.1, no.1, Spring 2013, pp. 33-59.

- Miles, William FS, and David A. Rochefort. "Nationalism versus Ethnic Identity in Sub-Saharan Africa." *The American Political Science Review*, 1991, pp. 393-403.
- Mittelman, James H. "Globalization: An Ascendant Paradigm? Implications for African Studies." *The Study of Africa: Global and Transnational Engagements* Vol. II, edited by Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, Codestria, 2007, pp. 27-44.
- Moutsiwa, Siyanda. "I'm Done with African Immigrant Literature."
www.okayafrica.com/im-done-with-african-immigrant-literature/
- Moyo, Dambisa. *Dead Aid: Why Aid is Not Working and How There is A Better Way for Africa*, Farrar, 2009.
- Navaratnam, Subashini. "Race-in-America is a Central Character in Americanah."
www.popmatters.com/review/173884-americanah-by-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie
- Nielsen, Cynthia R. "Frantz Fanon and the Negritude Movement: How Strategic Essentialism Subverts Manichean Binaries." *Callaloo* vol.36, no. 2, Spring 2003, pp. 342-352. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/515055/pdf> Accessed October 30, 2017.
- Nussbaum, Martha Craven. *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, edited by Joshua Cohen. Beacon Press, 1996.
- "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." *The Cosmopolitanism Reader*, edited by Garrett W. Brown and David Held, Polity Press, 2010, pp. 155-62.
- Ojaide, Tanure. *Indigeneity, Globalization and African Literature: Personally Speaking*. Palgrave, 2015.
- "Migration, Globalization, and Recent African Literature." *World Literature Today*, 2008, pp. 43-46.

- Okuyade, Ogaga. "Weaving Memories of Childhood: The New Nigerian Novel and the Genre of the Bildungsroman" *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*. vol.41, no. 3-4, 2011, pp. 137-66.
- Olaniyan, Tejumola. "Africa: Varied Colonial Legacies." *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Henry Swartz and Sangeetha Ray. Blackwell, 2000, pp. 269-281.
- Pessar, Patricia R. and Sarah J. Mahler, "Transnational Migration: Bringing Gender In." *The International Migration Review* vol.37, no. 3, Fall 2003, pp. 812-846.
- Reuter, Stefanie, "Becoming a Subject: Developing a Critical Consciousness and Coming to Voice in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*." Anja Oed (Hg.): *Reviewing the Past, Negotiating the Future: The African Bildungsroman*, 2015, 1- 12. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2808396> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2808396>
- Robbins, Bruce. *Perpetual War: Cosmopolitanism from the Viewpoint of Violence*. Duke UP, 2012.
- Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. 1971. Howard UP, 1981.
- Rorty, Richard. "The Unpatriotic Academy." *New York Times*, February 13, 1994. <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/02/13/opinion/the-unpatriotic-academy.html>
- Salazar, Noel B. "Tanzanian Migration Imaginary. *Migration and Culture*, edited by Robin Cohen and Gunvor Jonsson. Elgar, 2009, pp. 673-87.
- Schoene, Berthold. *The Cosmopolitan Novel*. Edinburgh UP, 2009.
- Selasi, Taye. "Bye-Bye Babar" *The Lips*. March 3, 2005 <http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76>

Snowden Jr., Frank M. *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks*. Harvard UP, 1983.

Steele, Shelby. *The Content of our Character: A New Vision of Race in America*. St Martins, 1990.

Stiglitz, Joseph E. *Globalization and its Discontents*. W.W. Norton, 2003.

.... *Making Globalization Work*. W.W. Norton, 2006.

Taiwo, Olufemi. "Exorcising Hegel's Ghost: Africa's Challenge to Philosophy." *African Studies Quarterly*, vol1, no. 4, 1998, pp. 3-16.

Taylor, Magnus. "Where is African Literature at Today?" *New Internationalist*, 25 June, 2013 <https://newint.org/contributors/magnus-taylor/>

Toure. *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness? What it Means to Be Blacks Now*. Free, 2011.

National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. "*The 9/11 Commission Report*." <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a485811.pdf>

Yancy, George. *On Race: 334 Conversations in a Time of Crisis*. Oxford UP, 2017.

APPENDIX A: PERMISSION TO REPRINT

Re: Ufahamu piece republish request

JANICE RUTH LEVI<jrlevi@ucla.edu>

Mon 11/20/2017 11:54 PM

To: Nana Osei-Opare <oseiopare@g.ucla.edu>•

Cc:MADINA THIAM <mthiam@ucla.edu>; ONIWE, BERNARD
<oniwe@email.sc.edu>•

Hello Bernard,

First, congratulations on finalizing your dissertation. Yes, we do allow for reproduction of published articles as long as you acknowledge that the original publication was in Ufahamu: the Journal of African Studies 39: 1 (2016). Please do use our full title for the acknowledgments and provide the online link to your article.

All the best,

Janice

Janice R. Levi

PhD Student, Dept. of History I University of California, Los Angeles

CoEditor-in-Chief, Ufahamu: Journal of African Studies

On Mon, Nov 20, 2017 at 9:16 PM, Nana Osei-Opare <oseiopare@q.ucla.edu> wrote:

Dear Janice and Madina,

I hope all is well. Bernard Ayo Oniwe published his piece, "Cosmopolitan Conversation and Challenge in Teju Cole's Open City" in Volume 39, Issue 1, 2016. He would like to know whether he can republish it elsewhere.

@Bernard, how are you? I am no longer an editor at Ufahamu. I have not been in charge for a year and a half now. I am passing your request to the current editor-in-chiefs of Ufahamu.

Best,

-Nana,

Nana Osei-Opare

Ph.D. Candidate I UCLA

History Department

Stanford University '11

A.B. & M.A.

St. Benedict's Prep, Newark, NJ '07 | <https://www.cbsnews.com/videos/the-resurrection-of-st-benedicts-y>

He/Him/His/They/Them

"The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. "
<https://outlook.office.com/owa/?realm=email.sc.edu&path=/mail/search> 1/2 12/5/2017

Mail - oniwe@email.sc.edu

-Steve Biko

"Whatever hurts my brother hurts me. "

-St. Benedict's Prep